JOHN ADAMS

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I

1735–1784

PAGE SMITH

Garden City, New York
DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC.

1962

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 63-7188
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Printed in the United States of America
First Edition

To my wife
through whom I know what Abigail meant to John

INTRODUCTION

A BOOK is at best a poor contrivance to catch a life in, especially a life as abundant as that of John Adams. But adequate or not, it is all we have. A biographer need no longer be defensive about his task. In our brief infatuation with history as a science, it seemed to us that the intractability and disorder of the individual life could have little meaning as contrasted with vast movements, with the inexorable logic of forces of whom particular persons were but the "shadow symbols." That time, fortunately for all who delight in history as a human drama, has passed. We know now as we always should have known that we can make no deeper penetration into history than through the lives of the wisest and most sentient individuals who have themselves shaped our world.

Man, as he gropes his way into the future, needs guides and perceptors; each era thus seeks its own ancestors and those we choose tell as much about us as about our progenitors. Perhaps we, as a part of that posterity to which Adams looked for sympathy and for understanding, are at last ready to listen attentively to a voice which has preserved across the intervening generations its New England accents, its vigor of expression, its mother wit. It is doubtless more than a coincidence that the great body of Adams papers have been made available to scholars at a time when the particular truths which Adams exemplified in his life and thought are most relevant to contemporary America. The heirs of John Adams may have exercised a wiser custodianship than they knew, for while the papers of the family, recorded on some 608 reels of microfilm, do not materially alter the picture of John Adams that can be drawn from published sources, they greatly enrich that picture and give many fascinating insights into the Revolutionary era. They thereby provide a splendid vehicle for John Adams' re-entry into American history.

One may argue at some length about the role of the biographer; I would like to make explicit the general presuppositions which have guided this work. I have, throughout these volumes, attempted to see the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century world through the eyes of John Adams. I have been, I trust, less concerned with justifying than with understanding and explicating my subject's particular angle of vision. At the same time I have tried to present John Adams with all his foibles and eccentricities, his blemishes as well as his virtues, so that he may be seen in his full humanity. And I am confident that he would have asked no more. The fact that he scrupulously preserved letters written in the heat of often violent moments, so that the record might be full and honest, places his biographer under the obligation to be no less.

Many people have assisted me in various stages of the preparation of these volumes. Mrs. Frank Harris, who is in charge of the Adams National Historic Site at Quincy, gave most generously of her time and extensive knowledge of the family and of Quincy and its environs. The hours I spent with her marked, for me, a most auspicious beginning to a biography of John Adams. Lyman Butterfield, editor of the Adams Papers, endured my queries with unfailing courtesy. Jane and Wendell Garrett read the manuscript, corrected numerous errors and, in conversation and through correspondence, gave me the benefit of their wide knowledge and critical discernment.

My colleagues Bradford Perkins and Keith Berwick read large portions of the manuscript and made many corrections and helpful suggestions. Gay Little gave it devoted attention. Conversations with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Douglass Adair about the life and times of John Adams were invariably illuminating to me, and the encouragement of Samuel Eliot Morison did much to launch me on this rather formidable venture. I have frequently been sustained by the interest and advice of Elizabeth Johnson.

I would also like to acknowledge my debt to Mr. John H. Holmes. Mr. Holmes, whose grandfather fought in the American Revolution and who is now in his ninety-fifth year, read the entire manuscript and offered me much encouragement. Full of the grandeur of old age, he gave me, I am sure, a keener insight into John Adams' later years.

LeBaron Barker has been a most perceptive and sympathetic editor and the book has profited at every stage from the editorial scrutiny of Mrs. John Tebbel.

I wish to thank the American Philosophical Society for a grant from the Penrose Fund which helped me to get started on this project. My research has been generously assisted by the University of California at Los Angeles. I am very much indebted to the trustees of the Adams Papers for permission to quote from the microfilm of the papers; to the American Antiquarian Society for permission to quote from the letters of Abigail Adams in Stewart Mitchell's *New Letters;* to the Harvard University Press for permission to quote from the *Diary and Autobiography;* to Lester Cappon for permission to quote from the *Adams-Jefferson Correspondence* and to many others, too numerous to mention, for various courtesies.

JOHN ADAMS

I

THE OLD MAN was, to the children of the town, old beyond reckoning, old as the beginning of things, old for all they knew as Penn's Hill overlooking the bay or the Blue Hills whose atmospheric magic turned green trees violet. Tenacious of life, like a blasted oak on his beloved hill, life burned in him, distant, remote, hardly discernible. Half blind, palsied, the sharp nose sunk over the toothless mouth to the indomitable chin, he sat with the ancient hands, large-veined, knotted, the dry skin crusted with the mold of age, clasped over the great ivory-knobbed stick, the eyes faded blue, dim and inward. In the blasted tree the sap still ran strong as a tide and the mind, still mercifully keen, turned over and over with always fresh wonder the riddle of life, of what God had revealed and what God had veiled. That—the meaning, the design, the strange destiny of man and of that portion of man he knew and loved best, America—occupied his thoughts through the endless days, days beyond counting that slipped into seasons and years, inexorable, new and yet familiar. The meaning, the design, the puzzle that would not stay comfortably solved but that drew him back again and again to the classical philosophers, to the Bible, or to more modern theorists—fashionable continental thinkers or Scottish proponents of Common Sense—this and the crowded, hectic drama of his own life, these were the poles of his world. He had had a long time to consider them, a kind of second lifetime. For he had lived one life full of passion, of violence, of fine loves and fine hates. He had seen the world shaken by revolutions and nations made, and he had been himself a shaker and a maker, and when that life was done he had gone back to the familiar earth of his birthplace, gone back to wait for death. But in that beloved soil his soul's roots had drawn fresh nourishment, enduring life. So for a quarter of a century he waited in Quincy nee Braintree for death and the future state of rewards that he devoutly anticipated. And while he waited he wrote letters as long as his shaky hand could trace the words and then he dictated to a succession of patient anonymous nieces and granddaughters. Before he wrote and while he wrote he arranged and rearranged, marshaled and reviewed the multitudinous letters and papers that he had sent or received over his active lifetime, his first life, for New England-like he never threw anything away, even the confidential family missives that ended with the admonition, "burn this letter." Then, haunted by the judgments of posterity, he painstakingly refought old battles, retried old causes, stirred the fires of ancient controversies with aged heroes who like himself jealously guarded and not infrequently burnished their reputations. And old wounds, better left undisturbed, opened and bled, and cracked old voices rose once more in angry accusation or protest.

Age did not mellow him. His humor, with its rough countryman's flavor, its colloquial bite and aphoristic seasoning, pierced through the crumbling flesh. He still impaled his enemies with a phrase sharp as an entomologist's pin.

In the endlessly, sometimes bitterly recurring days, he read until he read his tired eyes out, and then, again like the patient scribes, spinster relatives read to or shouted at him weighty philosophical tomes, the classical authors in translation, political treatises by wordy incompetents. Poor ladies, bent to the will of the old man whose mind burned ceaselessly in the body's decaying mansion, they grew old before their sparse days, their voices thickened, their eyes blurred. Like soldiers they fell and their places were taken by new recruits. The old man was inexhaustible, omnivorous. The letters poured out, explaining, correcting, justifying, vindicating, colored with self-righteousness, redeemed by the admission of vanity. The record must be put straight in anticipation of the implacable judgments of posterity. There were other letters, too, letters to old friends, allies or adversaries in remote battles—to Benjamin Rush, and (after Rush's intercession) to Thomas Jefferson, to John Taylor of Caroline, to his Dutch friend, Van Der Kemp, and a company of ancients whose ranks dwindled year by year.

In the long twilight at Braintree, the orbit of his life which once extended through oceans and continents shrank from the circle of the Blue Hills to the boundaries of his farm and came at last to encompass, except for occasional expeditions to adjacent towns, merely the house. Through innumerable relatives, through visitors come to pay homage to a symbol of greatness, through his correspondents, above all through his adored son, he tried to savor the remarkable new nation born out of his travail and that of his contemporaries. In time, like his rival Jefferson, he became a national institution, a ruined but noble monument who lived on, with the Virginian, a presence from the past, to remind a restless, bustling generation of its antecedents.

For a man whose appetite for life was insatiable, who had met it head on with a kind of hungry passion, the second life, the life of waiting and reflecting, was graced by the recollections of his boyhood years in the town of his birth.

John Adams was born in Braintree, Massachusetts, on October 19, 1735. His forebears had been simple people, pious, thrifty, hard-working Puritans. The founder of the family in America, John's great-great-grandfather, Henry Adams, a farmer and maltster from England, had settled in Braintree in 1640. One son, Joseph, continued the family trade besides serving the town as selectman and surveyor of highways. His eldest son, also called Joseph, had followed in his father's footsteps. Among the younger Joseph's numerous progeny was John, father of the John Adams with whose life we are concerned. The elder John Adams married Susanna Boylston, daughter of one of the most prominent families in the Commonwealth. In later years his son surmised that it had been this union which had lifted the Adams family of Braintree out of the obscurity of small-town life.

The New England village which contained the young Adams was certainly one of man's most remarkable creations. To be sure rural cultivators had lived in small communities since the beginnings of civilization, but the American subgenus town to which Braintree belonged stood in a new relation to the wider culture of which it was a part. It had its chiefs and tribal elders, its intimate and complicated web of family and kinship ties, its festivals and folkways, its ritual observances, its institutions, its primal dependence on the cycles and the caprices of nature. It was in all these ways a classic social unit. What distinguished it from the villages of the Old World, reaching back as far as the agricultural communities of Sumeria, was the extraordinary engagement of the inhabitants of Braintree and her sister communities with the world that reached far beyond the boundaries of the town, a painful awareness of the town's critical situation as a focus of the unending struggle between God and man. The town was perhaps most remarkable for this "existential" engagement, the terms of which were set by its theology.

If life was an arena wherein one's soul was tested by God, the town was the particular state where the testing took place. A good Puritan thus kept a kind of daily audit of his soul's state of grace and submitted the account to God in private prayer and public meeting. The result was life led, within the confines of the rural village, on the highest plateau of self-consciousness and led, moreover, with an intensity that modern man cannot imagine. If heaven was near at hand, so was hell. If God, with His grace, might draw one up out of the miry depths, it was at least as likely that the Devil would drag one down into torment without end. There was nothing, as the greatest divine of the age reminded his congregation, that held the sinner out of hell any one moment but God's grace, which could not be bargained for or won, but was given or withheld as God had determined from the beginning of time. All men were sinners; none had within themselves the power to achieve salvation. The best were desperately wicked in God's sight, ineffably soiled, worthy of nothing but contempt. Yet the inexhaustible reservoir of God's love was always available to the faithful. From it the people of Braintree drew heart and strength.

Such was the beloved community, a community of faithful Christian men and women who lived in fear of God's justice, acutely aware of the weakness of the flesh while aspiring to the spirit. This world had little or none of the simple, instinctual life of rural towns in the Old World. It was true that dogma and doctrine were tempered by the shrewd practicality of countrymen the world over, but the tension and anxiety of a self-conscious and assertive people, rather than the stolid endurance of European peasants, marked the citizens of Braintree.

Against the inscrutability of God's intentions the town armed itself as best it could. Its members were reminded daily that the Lord gave and the Lord took away. Unwelcome births, crippling accidents, devastating illnesses, premature deaths, all answered, in ways that faith must accept if reason could not fathom, God's purpose. Gluttony, lust, avarice, envy, malice, greed—the classic Christian sins—walked through the streets and lanes of Braintree. Though drunkenness and sexual license were with it, as with its sister communities, the most conspicuous examples of human frailty, they were far from exhausting the town's resources for sin. But for every sin, however black, or however recurrent, there was forgiveness. God's forgiveness, the Scriptures taught, was boundless; it had only to be asked for to be given, and the men and women of Braintree, surrogates for God, dispensed His forgiveness to all who were genuinely penitent.

In Braintree life pressed in upon its people, insistent and insatiable, strange and extraordinary, fecund of wonder beyond even the ingenious formularies of Westminster or Geneva. No dweller there could long evade some apprehension of the nature of man's terrestrial dilemma. To say life pierced through the armor of theology would be to misstate the case since theology was at least in part the answer the community gave to the cruel inconsistencies of a demanding life. A textbook formula might say that the town's theology enabled it to endure the often appalling rigors of a frontier existence, but this would suggest a passive attitude. It would perhaps be truer to say that the theology subdued and surmounted the frontier, tamed and domesticated it, but this again would tell only a part of the story. The theology contained the education, the intellectual life as well as the emotional, the political as well as the educational, the economic as well as the political. All of which is to say that the limits of its theology marked the limits of the town.

Protestant Christianity, Calvinist in its temper, if increasingly relaxed in its dogma, dominated the town's life, shaped it, directed it, made it, in its own view at least, an important arena in the universal drama of salvation. To spend one's boyhood in such a community meant to bear its imprint for life on the conscious and subconscious levels of one's existence.

As the Puritans shaped the life of the town, the temple of that faith—the meeting-house—was the physical focus of the community. A new meeting-house which had strained the resources of the town to its limits had been built in 1732, three years before John Adams was born. Here, in a building as uncompromising as a box, the Reverend John Hancock presided, here John Adams was baptized. In the earlier meeting-house the interior had been divided, democratically enough, with benches for the men on the right of the pulpit and for the women on the left, with the gallery reserved for the boys of the town, Negroes and Indians. The new meeting-house measured the growth of social stratification in the community. The tribal elders had their own pews stretching around the walls of the building and even encroaching on the floor itself. The center of the church was taken up with the "men's seats" and the "women's seats," the front benches reserved for the town's ancients.

The Adams pew, located in a prized spot immediately to the left of the pulpit, advertised the senior Adams' position in church and community. In front of the pulpit stood the deacons' bench and here John's father, who served as deacon throughout most of John's childhood, took his seat each Sabbath with his fellows.

Every Sunday year round there were two services, one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and these the whole town attended. Hardly more insulated than a barn, the meeting-house was stifling in summer and bitterly cold in winter. In the sharpest weather the Adamses and their neighbors brought foot stoves filled with hot coals to warm numb toes, and on more than one occasion at the communion table the "Sacramental Bread . . . frozen pretty hard . . . rattled sadly as broken into the plates." Those who survived such rigors were doubtless strengthened in body and spirit. Certain it was that many who endured lived to extreme old age. Between the two services those who lived outside the town were little inclined to return home. They visited neighbors, or the nearby tavern, or, more generally, collected and gossiped in the horse shed adjacent to the church. There, with a great fire to thaw them out, the adults politicked and the young people courted.

The congregation came to meeting to hear the Word spoken by the preacher in prayer and sermon. The prayer which opened the service was often directed at the immediate problems and crises of the town. It was generally exhortatory, chastising the congregation for sins of omission and commission, reviewing the community's collective state of grace, instructing and admonishing. And it was often interminably long, as though the Reverend Mr. Hancock hoped he might pray sinners into submission if he could not lead them to repentance.

Then came the psalm-singing. Since the Puritans abhorred organs as a popish innovation the psalms must be "lined out" by a leader and repeated by the congregation, a procedure painful to sensitive ears.

The sermon consumed the greater part of the two meetings. It was above all the Word that the Puritans adored. They had a passion for sermons as in other ages men have loved ritual and liturgy, the communion table, or the church edifice. "The main thing was simply the spoken word, the energy and accuracy of the spoken word, the salvation communicated in the sacrament of the word."[1] Undoubtedly, all of the congregation of the north precinct of Braintree parish did not listen with equal attentiveness to sermons that not infrequently lasted an hour or two. Boys scuffled and roughhoused in the gallery when not under the severe eye of the tithingman; John Adams let his attention wander to the girls who with their rustlings and covert glances were indeed distracting; the Negroes languished during the sermon and only revived for the psalm-singing. Nonetheless the town was fed spiritually by the sermon and the preacher revered for the power and skill with which he explicated the Scriptures. Braintree, like its sister communities, was, as we would say today, a highly verbalized society. The force, the majesty, and the expressiveness of the English tongue pervaded the town of Braintree. Born out of the cadence of the King James Bible, salted by country wit and flatted by indigenous accents, it marked the New Englander and the culture that became his legacy. If the Word in its greatest power and purity was spoken in meeting, it was spoken with scarcely less vigor in that forum where the congregation became the civil community, and it was similarly honored in the school.

The transformation of church meeting into town meeting was simple enough. Deacons became selectmen, tithingmen appeared as clerks or moderators, the tribal elders assumed civil functions. The principal duty of the town in meeting was to elect officers who, although they performed their duties without pay, were held to a strict accounting. Then came the matter of yearly expenditures. The schools must be provided for, the highways maintained, and the poor and insane supported. Pitifully little was paid to those who were indigent through age or incapacity, or to those who cared for the town's insane, but it was still a large drain on the town's resources. The question of the common lands of the town was a perennial bone of contention as was the effort of the lower part of the town, the south parish, to assert its independence of the upper. Such were the year-to-year concerns of the town meeting. If the issues lacked cosmic significance they were nonetheless hotly argued. Indeed so lively did the debates become on occasion that a rule was passed in 1732 forbidding the folk of the town to stand on the meeting-house seats.

From early youth John Adams accompanied his father to town meeting and there went to school in a nursery of democratic politics. Though the stage was a narrow one, the passions and prejudices, ambitions, fears and jealousies that were revealed thereon were common to mankind. "The springs of action" in Braintree town meeting were not dissimilar to those in vaster deliberative assemblies. The young Adams could observe there the means by which opponents of a measure were cozened and beguiled: the effect of shrewd appeals to interest or higher appeals to reason; the arts of political management, of compromise, concession and persuasion.

Braintree, pure democracy though it was, had its chief as well as its tribal elders. When John Adams was a boy, John Quincy was the great man of the town. For forty years speaker of the Massachusetts Assembly, colonel of militia, member of the Governor's Council, squire of the Braintree parish whose power was acknowledged throughout the colony, Colonel Quincy was a guide and model for young John. Simple, despite his greatness, austere but kindly, he was, above all, an independent man. In John Adams' words, the Colonel "had a high sense of his accountability to the Supreme Governor of the world for the trusts imposed in him, and studiously avoided an ensnaring dependency on any man, and what . . . should tend to lay him under any disadvantage in the discharge of his duty." In this John Adams sought to emulate him. To be nobody's man, to owe nothing except to God and his own conscience was his early determination and lifelong aim.

If Colonel John Quincy was the chief of the small world of Braintree and its environs, the tribal elders maintained their lesser jurisdictions. The Basses, the Crosbys, the Belchers, the Spears, the Marshes, Beales, Baxters and Bracketts were all families associated over the generations with the unspectacular history of the town. From their number came the town clerks, selectmen, hog reeves, tithingmen, constables, assessors, overseers of the poor, fence viewers, surveyors of the highway. They spoke in church and state with special authority and in concert they were irresistible.

Perhaps first among them was John's father, John Adams, Sr., a lieutenant in the town militia, a deacon of the church, a selectman of the town for a number of terms. As his son wrote of him at his death, "almost all the business of the town being managed by him . . . for twenty years together." The older Adams' pride was the integrity of his word. His son thought him "the honestest man I ever knew," and added, "In wisdom, piety, benevolence and charity in proportion to this education and sphere of life, I have never seen his superior."[2] The father's influence on the son was strong and enduring. The boy loved and admired him and sought, in all things, to imitate him. His attachment to his mother was equally close. Susanna Boylston Adams with her Brookline and Boston background brought a touch of urban sophistication to the family. She had, moreover, an inexhaustible stock of improving precepts which her son took to heart.

John had two younger brothers, Peter Boylston Adams, born in 1738 and named after his maternal grandfather, and Elihu Adams, born three years later. Together they made up an affectionate and close-knit family, united in the simple routines of farm life. Their sense of kinship was a keen one and there was much visiting with Boylston and Adams cousins in Brookline, Weymouth and Milton.

The Adams farmhouse was indistinguishable from most of the houses of Braintree. It was a plain two-story, clapboard structure, built around a large chimney core whose fireplaces provided heat for its four rooms (two upstairs and two down) and fire for cooking. The rear roof was carried down over the "lean-to," thereby making two more narrow rooms at the back of the house, one of which served as the kitchen, and two additional cramped cubbyholes under the upstairs eaves where the boys slept. Their quarters hardly had space for three beds and feeble light penetrated from small gable windows at each end of the house. The house stood close by the coast road, upright and unadorned, forthrightly rectangular, entirely functional, with only such grace as simplicity might give it.

Braintree Township was John Adams' range. Bounded on the east by the heavily indented shore line, it ran west to the Blue Hills, south to the Monatiquot River on the Weymouth line, and north through Milton to the more considerable Neponset River with its broad tidal flats. Squantum formed the northern arm of Quincy Bay whose southern extension, Hough's Neck, thrust out into the Atlantic Ocean, pointing like a thumb at Peddock's Island. The whole township was bisected laterally by three creeks running to inlets on the sea—Sachem's, Furnace and Town. Town Brook ran through Adams' farm to the Town Landing. Below the landing the creek was navigable by shallow scows and loads could be lighted out through Fore River to coasting vessels in the bay.

Over this expanse John Adams roved until he knew by heart every pond, creek and swamp, every fold, hill, inlet and indentation, and, venturing farther, every island within a skiff's range. He knew the paths and prospects on the wooded ridge of the Blue Hills, the trees favored by the noisy red squirrels, and on the Farms, an area of rolling fields north of town, he knew where to kick up a rabbit or a partridge as he knew the holes and eddies in Furnace Brook where trout might be raised, the shaded banks of Great Pond where bass and perch lurked.

John's closest companions were the Quincy boys, Edmund and Samuel, sons of Colonel Josiah Quincy. Edmund was two years older than John, Samuel his own age. John Tileston, a year older than John, and destined to be for seventy years the Braintree schoolmaster, was another warm friend. John Hancock, the minister's son, was a year younger than John. Quite different in temperament and a little inclined to trade on his father's exalted station, he followed where the older boy led.

Near the Beale farm stood what appeared to be the remnants of an old fort. The town had lost the memory of its building or its history, but for John Adams and his friends it was a fortress from whose sunken battlements they repelled hordes of howling redskins. The Ponkapoag Indians who came each spring from their reservation at Stoughton to fish in the Neponset had little about them to suggest forest raiders. Colonel Quincy was the colony's agent for the remnant of the tribe and a handful of the most ancient came almost weekly to his farm where he gave them, with great politeness, beer and cider and the small dole which the colony allowed, recording in his ledger benefactions to Mary Sycamugg, Amos Ahanton, Hezekiah Squamogg and Abigail Quock. Dreary as they looked, a boy's imagination was nonetheless capable of transforming them into wild savages slipping like shadows through the forest on the hunt for tender young palefaces.

John ran through the ages of youth at a characteristically headlong pace. As a child he whittled boats to launch upon Little Pond and sailed kites from Penn's Hill overlooking the bay where an onshore wind would carry his flyer as high as the sky. Driving hoops along the rutted roads was another long-remembered pleasure. Fiercely competitive, John strove to outdo his companions—trying to sail his boats farther, fly his kites higher, roll his hoops faster than his fellows.

For country boys each season has its inventory of juvenile pleasures and John and his companions sampled them all. Spring meant marbles and quoits, summer swimming and boating, winter sledding and skating, the fall hunting. Though small, John was agile and muscular and prided himself on his prowess as a wrestler. Few of the boys of Braintree escaped a testing and most of them succumbed to his strength and skill.

As he grew older his greatest delight was shooting. Hunting took him over the loved and familiar fields and hills. Squirrels, rabbits, woodchucks or predatory crows drew him out with his fowling piece whenever schoolwork and farm chores left him free. He waited at the field's edge to take a shot at the cautious woodchuck beside his hole, called crows from a field copse, started rabbits with his dog. Later he learned the special excitement of shooting, of hitting the woodcock in his whirring flight just before he dipped out of sight in a forest tangle, of winging the low-flying quail or outwaiting the heavy-bodied turkey gobbler in a brush blind. In the fall when the ducks flew south, they dropped down to the Neponset flats and there John lay in a marsh scow disguised with river reeds to bag canvasback, teal, or mallard. Shooting in the woods and fields of Braintree gave the young Adams a delight which, as he later wrote, he never felt "for any other business, study or amusement."[3]

Imaginative, lively, quick and handsome, John had a particular fondness for girls and they, in turn, responded to him. The junior gallant had an expressiveness of face and speech that charmed the village belles. From the age of ten he made numerous conquests or fell victim himself to bright eyes and appealing smiles. Moreover, as he entered his early teens he revealed a precocious masculinity, a latent sexual vigor, that attracted members of the opposite sex. At the same time he was well aware of the dangers as well as the delights of feminine proximity. His parents had most solemnly instructed him in the practical morality that must guide his relations with the females of Braintree. They pointed out to him what he was certainly quite conscious of—the very evident results of breeches of the sexual code. Hasty marriages of boys and girls in their teens were common. Five- and six-month babies were accepted by the town—it could not be said without comment—but with no overt disapproval if the parents confessed to their lapse and asked forgiveness in meetings. Illegitimate children were less frequent but there were enough of them about to serve as object lessons on the consequences of sin. There was in Braintree, as in other rural towns close to the compelling sexuality of the barn- and farmyard, an almost tangible sensuality. The tides of physical desire rose in the boys and girls as they rose in the farm stock. Many yielded, some reluctantly, restrained by the fear of Calvin's devil or the more practical outcome of illicit love-making, others gladly and heedlessly in hot animal rut.

But John Adams was saved from the effects, as he put it, of "my natural temperament." He learned to burn. The admonitions of his parents, the examples of the fallen, his own "Principles and Sense of decorum" saved him from fathering bastards or dishonoring his neighbors' daughters. As an old man, he found it one of the chief blessings of his life "consolatory beyond all expression," as he put it, that he had never, though often tempted, yielded to any of the numerous forms of "libertinism" which the ingenuity of a rural town offered its youth.[4]

Taught by his father to read, John was dispatched at an early age to the town's primary school, kept by Moses Belcher's mother. The good lady, but little educated herself, taught reading, writing, and simple ciphering to the small fry, male and female, of Braintree. The children who attended Dame Belcher's school, however meager their training might be, were led at once onto the rocky path of Puritan orthodoxy. *The New England Primer* began by reminding its young readers of their fallen state: "In Adam's fall/We sinned all," stood for "A," and so proceeded through the alphabet to "Zebediah served the Lord."

In unison John and his schoolmates recited the somber verses:

There is a dreadful fiery hell,
Where wicked ones must always dwell;
There is a heaven full of joy,
Where goodly ones must always stay;
To one of these my soul must fly,
As in a moment, when I die.

In an age when the mortality rate among growing children was very high, they repeated:

In the burying place may see,
Graves shorter there than I;
From death's arrest no age is free,
Young children too must die:
My God, may such an awful sight
Awakening be to me.

The *Primer* offered John Adams, hardly more than an infant, a "dialogue between Christ, Youth and the Devil," in which God addresses the bad child in these words:

Thou hast thy God offended so,
Thy soul and body I'll divide:
Thy body in the grave I'll hide,
And thy dear soul in Hell must lie
With Devils to Eternity. . . .
Thus end the days of woeful youth,
Who won't obey or mind the truth;
Nor hearken to what preachers say,
But do their parents disobey:
They in their youth go down to Hell,
Under eternal wrath to dwell.
Many don't live out half their days,
For cleaving unto sinful ways.

Children of both sexes and a wide variety of ages were jammed into a single room. There they droned through their lessons under Mrs. Belcher's eye. It was a scene which defied every principle of the new science of pedagogy that emanated from Switzerland, but it served the town's purposes well enough. All of the children learned to read and to write, albeit often very crudely, and the brightest advanced in time to the Latin school. John Adams, lively and quick, was Dame Belcher's pet. Every week in the fall term, she carried corn from her farm to the mill and John was her favorite assistant. She gave him three coppers when he bore the load the four miles or more to the old Stoughton Mill on the Neponset and always charged him solemnly to save his money and buy land with it. John learned the lesson well. Inheriting his father's farm in 1761, for the rest of his life he added systematically to his landholdings in Braintree Township.

The Latin school to which John Adams went when he had exhausted Dame Belcher's thin academic fare was presided over by Joseph Cleverly, Harvard—class of 1733, one of the town's handful of Episcopalians. Cleverly was that classic small-town type—the promising scholar turned sour. A "worthy" man but slouching and careless, he nourished a few tatters of scholarship while his pupils dozed and daydreamed. A chore to him, the lessons were likewise a chore to his charges. John, a twelve o'clock scholar, escaped the dull classroom routines to roam the parish in search of adventure. The sturdy, sunburned boy who ran headlong about the town with his noisy pack or roved the Blue Hills showed little sign of developing into a sober Harvard scholar. The senior Adams, who had resolved that Cambridge should be his eldest son's destination, was alarmed at John's unscholarly enthusiasms. Persevering, the father tried time and again to lure or drive him to his books. John for his part would have none of them. He had no love for books and wished only that his father would abandon the Harvard dream. "What would you be, child?" his father asked him.

"Be a farmer," John answered without hesitation.

"A farmer? Well then, young man, I will show you what it is to be a farmer. You shall go with me to Penn Ferry tomorrow morning and help me get thatch."

"I shall be very glad to go, sir," John replied.

The next day his father led him to the marsh and the two worked all day up to their knees in mud bending and cutting and tying the thick bundles of thatching. It was hot and tiring work but John stuck to it, trying to match his father's pace. That night after dinner, as John rested his aching muscles, his father challenged him. "Well, John, are you satisfied with being a farmer?"

"Yes, sir, I like it very well," the boy answered.

"Aye, but I don't like it so well," his father replied shortly, "so you shall go to school."[5]

Again boredom possessed John and he wished himself back in the mud among the creek thatch. Mr. Cleverly left him idling in arithmetic that John had mastered. Resentful of the master's sluggish pace, John took his book home and completed the course, outstripping his fellow pupils without the aid of the teacher's droning and uninspired guidance. For a prospective farmer it was perhaps a fatal step—to discover the pleasures of the unbidden and unguided mastery of an intellectual enterprise, however humble. John Adams, grudging scholar, had unwittingly involved himself in the adventuring of the mind. If farming never lost its charm for John Adams, it lost his exclusive allegiance.

There were, to be sure, other setbacks, other academic obstacles to overcome. If he had found his own doorway into the exciting world of mathematics, Latin remained for him a barren field. But his disinterest and his inattention to that language he hid from his father. In this "idle way" John continued to his fourteenth year, relishing the sports and joys of a country boy, sharing the farm chores with what was, for his father, a disconcerting enthusiasm. Yet his conscience was troubled by the knowledge that his father's hopes were set on his going to college. The schoolwork took him from the farm and cost his father the price of his labor. John was left an occasional farmer and a poor scholar. Perplexed and unhappy, he finally confronted his father. He wished to be taken from school and set to work on the farm. "You know I have set my heart on your education at college. Why must you resist?" his father asked. At his father's evident disappointment, John relented. "Sir," he answered, "I don't like my schoolmaster. He is so negligent and so cross that I never can learn anything under him. If you will be so good as to persuade Mr. Marsh to take me [Joseph Marsh was the son of a former Braintree minister and an able scholar], I will apply myself to my studies as closely as my nature will admit and go to college as soon as I can be prepared."[6]

John Adams' father went the same evening to confer with Marsh and next morning at breakfast he told his son that the matter had been settled. He was to study with Marsh. The change proved to be a happy one. Marsh was kind and patient. He recognized at once that the boy had a fine mind. He was, in fact, a curious combination of traits—sober and reserved, passionate and intense, stiff and shy yet affectionate and responsive; impulsive, headstrong, sharp-tongued, with an aggressive self-assurance balanced by an almost morbid self-doubt. Marsh discovered in his pupil, moreover, an extraordinary capacity for plain hard work, a conscientiousness that drove him mercilessly in pursuit of an Euclidean theorem or the meaning of an elusive Latin passage.

Although John Adams had little to say about his apprenticeship with Marsh, which lasted little more than a year, it was obviously a crucial experience. He would insist all his life that he was primarily a farmer, but he would never turn aside from the great intellectual adventure on which he embarked under Marsh's tutelage. The fowling piece lay neglected as his appetite for books, increased by what it fed upon, carried him to places, ages and companions remote indeed from Braintree, Massachusetts.

When the time came, with surprising swiftness, for him to seek admission to the college at Cambridge, John Adams mounted his father's horse and rode by to get Mr. Marsh, who was accompanying him to the ordeal. He found to his dismay that his mentor was unwell and dared not face the menace of threatening rain clouds. John must go alone, a long ride under the dreary skies, to present himself to "such great men as the President and fellows of a college." His first impulse was to retreat to the farm and await a more propitious year. Mr. Marsh was full of assurances that sounded hollowly in his ears. He, Marsh, had spoken a week ago to one of the tutors and prepared the way for him. They would expect him. He himself was entirely confident that John would acquit himself well and be honorably admitted. The thought of his father's disappointment as well as his tutor's nerved the youth for the enterprise. He set out for Cambridge, suffering as he went the dreadful pangs doubtless known to all examinees since the invention of examinations. At the college the sixteen-year-old farm boy faced the awesome, gowned and wigged array of President Holyoke and the company of tutors—Henry Flynt, Belcher Hancock and Joseph Mayhew. Mayhew, a stout, benign-looking gentleman into whose class John Adams would be admitted should he pass muster, handed him a passage of English to translate into Latin. As John glanced at it his heart sank. It contained words whose Latin equivalents he did not know. He foresaw the debacle in one frightening vision—failure, disgrace, his father's bitter but unreproachful disappointment, his mother's distress for him and for his father, and Mr. Marsh's chagrin. Mayhew summoned the unhappy boy to his study and turned to him. "There, child, is a dictionary, there a grammar, and there paper, pen and ink, and you may take your own time."

Armed with the dictionary, his apprehension gone, John tackled the translation with confidence. "The Latin was soon made, I was declared admitted and a theme given me to write on in the vacation."[7] He returned home, a minor hero, to the praises of his friends and joy of his parents. And then, in an orgy of dissipation, he spent the intervening weeks before the opening of college reading English magazines and novels.

II

THE HARVARD that John Adams went to in 1750 was undergoing one of its periodic reformations, this time under the presidency of Edward Holyoke, class of 1705. The President had had the distinction, as an undergraduate, of having more fines and black marks recorded against his name for breaches of discipline than any student of his day. But he had grown in time to be a good and wise man, pastor of the Marblehead congregation. He had first attracted attention by his election-day sermon delivered in 1736 before the Governor and General Court in which he boldly declared: "All forms of government originate from the people. . . . As these forms have originated from the people, doubtless they may be changed whensoever the body of them choose, to make such an alteration."

A liberal in politics, Holyoke was also an eloquent spokesman of the new spirit of toleration that was softening the strict tenets of New England Calvinism. "The minister or pastors," he had insisted on another occasion, "should have no hand in making any laws with regard to the spiritual affairs of their people . . . [and] have no right to impose their interpretations of the laws of Christ upon their flocks. . . . Every Man therefore is to judge for himself in these things."[1]

Much was said, both in approval and censure, of the President's "catholic temper," which soon affected the intellectual climate of the college. He had, moreover, "a good spirit of government." Kindly, he was at the same time a firm disciplinarian, a man "of a noble commanding presence." In his company students must stand or uncover. His girth won him the irreverent student nickname of "guts."

Next to President Holyoke in power and prestige was Professor John Winthrop. Winthrop was Hollis professor of mathematics and natural philosophy (science), "an excellent and happy teacher," who represented the new learning. He was an experimental scientist whose paper on observations of Halley's comet was read to the Royal Society in London by his friend and correspondent, Benjamin Franklin. It was Winthrop's responsibility to instruct the students in "Pneumaticks, Hydrostaticks, Mechanicks, Statics, Opticks" as well as in geometry, algebra and trigonometry, "in the principles of Astronomy and Geography, viz. . . . the use of globes, the motions of the heavenly bodies according to the different hypotheses of Ptolemy, Tycho Brahe, and Copernicus. . . ." In addition he gave public lectures once a week on natural philosophy and was enjoined to set aside "two or three hours in every week to converse with his pupils and endeavour to clear such difficulties as lie upon their minds."

There were four tutors in the college and each tutor took one class through its four-year curriculum, teaching all the subjects with the exception of the scientific courses taught by Winthrop and the lectures in Hebrew, a subject that was optional by John Adams' time, given once a week by Judah Monis, a converted Jew. The most famous of the tutors was Henry Flynt. When Adams entered the freshman class, "Father" Flynt had been a tutor for fifty years and the tales and legends associated with him were legion. In his early years before he became an institution in his own right, the more daring students had tried Flynt severely, hiding his wig, drinking his wine behind his back (he had a mirror and caught them), and putting snakes in his room. Yet he always spoke in disciplinary meetings of the faculty for leniency, reminding his fellow tutors that "wild colts often make good horses," an aphorism that President Holyoke could certainly not dispute. It was the custom of each class to give their tutor a piece of silver on graduation and Tutor Flynt accumulated so many silver bowls that one class finally presented him with a solid silver chamber pot which was borne solemnly in the commencement procession.

John Adams' tutor was Joseph Mayhew, who had examined him in Latin when he presented himself for admission. Mayhew, who had been a member of the class of 1730, was a benign if not especially inspiring man. Long-suffering, he was often subjected to "heinous insults" by his charges. Defied on one occasion by drunken students who rolled logs down the stairs by his study window, at other times he had had the doorknob broken off, his cellar broken open and his beer and brandy stolen.[2] A man more distinguished by patient endurance than intellectual brilliance, he guided his class along as best he could. It was not surprising that tutors were hard to come by. The job required, in theory at least, the combined talents of a universal genius and a south ward policeman. That the tutors were seldom appreciated by their charges is suggested by a bit of undergraduate doggerel aimed in their direction:

> The tutors now instead of being free
> Humane and generous as they ought to be,
> An awful distance dictatorial, keep,
> And mulcts [fines] and frowns on all their pupils heap.

One "spits his venom with sarcastick wit / And grins in laughter at the object hit," while another "instead of acting with an open soul / . . . peeps unmanly into every hole / And sometimes listens at his pupil's door, / Then runs back tiptoe as he came before."

The day began for Adams and his fellows in the thin light of dawn. He must be at morning prayers by six and there take his turn in reading from Scripture. After prayers came breakfast, served at the buttery hatch and carried to chambers. Although it was provided by college law "that there shall always be chocolate, tea, coffee and milk for breakfast, with bread, biscuit and butter," the steward seldom provided more than "bread, biscuit and milk," leaving it to the student to supplement his ration as best he could. John brought his own knife and spoon to commons and his own mug as well. The college provided him with a pewter plate and a generally soiled tablecloth.

Classes started at eight with a lecture, and the rest of the day was then devoted to study and recitation in the subject treated in lecture. Lunch came at noon and generally consisted of beef or mutton and bread washed down with beer and cider. The early afternoon was similarly spent in study. Evening prayers came at five, and supper—usually the same thin fare as lunch—at seven-thirty. Dessert, when there was any, was generally hasty pudding made from a mixture of rye, corn and wheat flour, or "apple or cranberry pie." On Saturday there was a special treat of salt fish. Writing of the food, a graduate of those years recalled that "the provisions were badly cooked . . . the soups were dreadful; we frequently had puddings made of flower and water and boiled so hard as not to be eatable; we frequently threw them out and kicked them about." What was euphemistically called "unlucky meat" sometimes found its way to the tables and set off riots in commons. Under such conditions some of the more prosperous students "lived out"—that is, had their meals in Bradish's tavern or brought food and prepared it in their room. Morning bevers consisting of "two sizings of bread and a cue [half-pint] of beer" were particularly meager and some students ate their morning meal in the nearby home of a townsperson. A few enterprising students even stole geese and turkeys to roast in their rooms but this was a hazardous venture because the aroma of cooking fowl could hardly fail to attract a prowling tutor.

The buttery, operated by the steward, provided another supplement to the institutional diet. Set up to remove "all just occasion for resorting to the different marts of luxury, intemperance and ruin" in Cambridge, it peddled a supply of paper and ink, tobacco, wine and cakes. In addition it constituted the "offices of administration," for the steward or butler kept the college records, collected fines and posted delinquencies on the door of the buttery hatch. There, too, was posted the college roll of every resident student by class, the students in each class listed according to the social standing of their fathers. In the class list of 1755, John Adams ranked fifteenth out of twenty-four.

After supper Adams and his friends were free to entertain themselves in any way their ingenuity might suggest until the college bell rang at nine at which time they must retire to their chambers.

As a freshman John began his studies with Greek and Latin, logic, rhetoric and physics. Rhetoric, which was defined in a commencement thesis of 1693 as "the art of speaking and writing with elegance," received special emphasis. The students followed the principles of rhetoric introduced into England by Erasmus. They studied and recited from manuals designed to improve the eloquence of their Latin compositions. The works of the classical authors—Cicero, Terence, and Sallust among others—were analyzed, and declamations, composed with special attention to their *elocutio* (style), were given each month.

Logic was the science of thinking in an orderly and rational manner. As the basis of much of the rest of the curriculum, it was started in the freshman year and attended to throughout the four years. In logic the students chewed on such gristly propositions as "Idea is the perfection of a thing as it exists objectively in the intellect," "the Idea flows from the mind as its effective origin, as from the object as its typical cause," and "Style is the clue of reason, as reason is the claw of style."[3] Sophomores continued their studies in logic, rhetoric, Greek and Latin and began natural philosophy. Since science (and especially mathematics) was Adams' greatest interest, he entered under the tutelage of Professor Winthrop with an anticipation that was not disappointed.

Junior sophisters added to their curriculum moral philosophy, metaphysics and geography, while the seniors, in addition to reviewing their earlier fields of study, also delved into mathematics and geometry. In metaphysics the students debated the theses "Space and Time are mere logical abstractions," "Time does not really exist, but is a measure of existence," or "Universal are little stars, ever shining in themselves but invisible in the concrete."

Every Saturday through the four years was given over to the study of theology under President Holyoke's supervision. He first gave an "exposition of Scripture" in the college hall and the students then memorized a work of dogmatic theology and recited it to their tutors. In addition to morning and evening prayers, all pupils took turns in "logical analysis" of the Bible, reading a passage and expounding its meaning before their fellows.

John Adams' parents, much as they wished him to have a Harvard education, had been unable to suppress misgivings as they watched him ride off from rural Braintree to the more sophisticated environment of the college. If there were many pitfalls for the careless or unwary in Braintree, there were many more such in Cambridge. It was a notorious fact that not a few young men went astray at that institution. There were many seductions from the serious and devout life of a young scholar: gambling, drinking, rioting, whoring, blasphemy and infidelity were perhaps most common. The rules of the college provided an inventory of undergraduate vices, ranging from Sabbath-breaking to playing at cards. Students were not infrequently disciplined for "abominable lasciviousness" and the "atrocious crime . . . of fornication" as well as for a host of lesser offenses. Absence or tardiness from prayers or from classroom lectures was punished by "pecuniary mulcts" of from one to four pence. But "ill-behavior" at prayers or public lectures brought a levy of a shilling sixpence. "Neglecting to repeat the Sabbath sermon" was likewise a fineable offense, and whosoever should "profane said day by unnecessary business, or visiting, walking on the Common, or in the streets or field, in the town of Cambridge, or by any sort of diversion before sunset . . . shall be fined not exceeding ten shillings." Neglect of class assignments was heavily penalized, as was "entertaining persons of ill-character," being absent from chambers or away from the college without permission, lying, "opening doors by pick-lock" (indeed this offense was so common that the mere possession of a picklock brought automatic punishment), "rudeness at meals," the buying or selling of liquor, "keeping guns, and going skating" on the Charles without permission, and "firing guns or pistols in the college yard." Scholars could not leave the college yard without "coat, cloak, or gown," while those who wore "indecent apparel" would be punished according to the nature of their offense unless they wore women's clothes, in which case the culprits would be liable to "degradation or expulsion."

Certainly the path laid out for the students from freshmen to senior sophisters was a straight and narrow one, but it was, equally, one frequently strayed from. By the middle of the eighteenth century at least, each year saw enough dramatic lapses to rouse anxiety in any parent and to give the color of fact to the dying mother's famous injunction. The extant letters of anxious Puritan parents to their Harvard sons make a kind of litany of apprehension. But the risk, great as it was, had to be run. Life was a succession of trials and hazards and the youth who passed relatively unscathed through the Cambridge college could be considered virtually immune to the grosser temptation of the flesh.

In addition to such dangers there was the troubling matter of Harvard's theological liberalism. Country pastors of the old school and orthodox laymen might mutter and lament. The fact was that Harvard had moved a long way from the strict faith of the fathers. Under Holyoke's "catholic temper" all manner of heresies flourished, or, if they were not encouraged, were not firmly suppressed. Yale was the only stronghold of orthodoxy. But Yale was in Connecticut and it took an uncommon devotion to the pure faith to dispatch a son to that remote and somewhat alien institution.

As a freshman, John Adams found his life very circumscribed. He was not allowed to wear his hat in the college yard; he could speak to no senior with his hat on; he must do errands at the bidding of any upper classman except during study periods, and must furnish, at request, "batts, balls, and foot-balls for the use of the students, to be kept at the Buttery." Shortly after the start of college the lowly newcomers were summoned to the room over the library in Harvard Hall by the sophomores, who read them the College Customs and threatened hideous punishments if they failed to observe the rules.

Although John Adams was involved in the normal number of scrapes and youthful follies, he avoided implication in the jape of his two Braintree friends, John Hancock and Samuel Quincy (his "early social and benevolent companion"), who were degraded and fined for "being most remarkably acting in making drunk" a Negro slave, "to such a degree as greatly indangered his life."[4]

Among Adams' special friends were John Wentworth, an engaging and high-spirited boy who shared John's intellectual appetites, Moses Hemmenway, Charles Cushing, scion of one of the Province's most important families, Nathan Webb (a cousin), William Browne, Philip Livingston, David Sewall, Daniel Treadwell, who, like John, found his greatest pleasure in mathematics and physics and was acknowledged to be the finest scholar in the college, and Tristam Dalton. With these companions, John tasted the delights of intellectual venture and found that his growing "Love of books and . . . fondness for study . . . dissipated all my inclination for sports," and, most extraordinary of all, "even for the society of the ladies."[5]

As junior sophister, Adams was invited to join a club which met in the evening to read "any new publications, or any poetry or dramatic compositions, that might fall in their way." He entered into the club's activities with enthusiasm and was delighted to be frequently designated to read, "especially tragedies." His orotund renditions were approved by his fellows and he basked in their applause.[6]

The world of the college undergraduate is a strange world. It is a most unusual arrangement, a company of boys, full of wild spirits and mercurial tempers, suspended between the protectiveness of home and the seriousness of adult life, bowing to the routines of classroom and recitation, solemnly observing the tribal rituals, the customary practices of their unique empire. College is a mystery, a sacred institution with its high priests and lay practitioners, its dogmas of the "pursuit of truth" and the "free play of the mind" (the Harvard students debated the propositions "Truth is intellectual conformity with substance," "The good-and-beautiful is the perfect virtue," "Whether angels have matter and form?" as students today debate propositions which have as much or as little meaning). The Harvard of John Adams' day was, in many ways, an exemplary institution. Unaware of cant about "the development of the individual" or "the creative curriculum," it did what it did confidently, unswervingly, and fairly efficiently to its own satisfaction and the inestimable good of the society which it served. John Adams was distracted by no choices, beset by no corrosive doubts. The college set itself simply to deepen and extend the dimensions of a familiar world. All sensible men agreed that there was a common body of knowledge—a goodly heritage of the ancients, supplemented by modern learning, illuminated by the unshakable truths of the Christian religion. It was the responsibility of the college to direct its guests to this feast of wit and wisdom and serve up the splendid fare. Consequently, the college experience of John Adams and his fellows had about it an extraordinary unity, a wholeness of intent and purpose that made for wholesomeness of mind and spirit. The experience of learning was not fragmented by quizzes, tests and examinations—that would have been unthinkable to preceptors who respected the integrity of bodies of learning—or indeed even by recesses and vacations. The only considerable "vacancy" of the college year was the six weeks after commencement. As the individual days were devoted in their entirety to a particular study, so, generally speaking, were the years. The result was order and unity, basic components of all higher intellectual life. Moreover, there was value in the fact that *all* the students of Harvard College followed the same well-established routines. They were thus a community of scholars in the deepest sense, for they shared the intellectual experiences of their college generation, and they could converse. Their highest common denominator was the best of what man had thought about his earthly predicament and his divine dimension. Harvard College in the 1750s doubtless fell about as short of the ideal as do most human agencies, but the results achieved by it and its several sister institutions were, nevertheless, extraordinarily good as events were to prove.

The four years were quickly gone for John. Like the wartime years of a civilian soldier, they lay so much outside the real world that they had about them a certain unsubstantial, dreamlike quality. But since the better realities are mostly born of dreams, John, by living through the great ages of man, was able to draw from the past a power that would sustain him over a long lifetime. It was not that he knew a great deal of history (indeed what history he assimilated was a kind of by-product of the rigid classical curriculum), or that the history that he did learn was very accurate. The important fact was that it entered into his chemistry, it stood at hand, ready to be of service. By living, however imperfectly, in the past, he had armed and armored himself for the future, and had drawn into his service a battalion of the great spirits of other ages.

As the greatest of his institution's ceremonials approached, Adams realized fully for the first time that he himself was a "commencer." The four years which, viewed from the beginning, had seemed only slightly shorter than eternity were gone, leaving a depressingly small residue of knowledge and a somewhat larger one of sentiment.

Harvard commencement was as close to a pagan festival as New England allowed itself to come. There were weeks of preparation for the great week (out of a Puritan year one day of celebration was hardly enough). The students and their parents and relatives, their brothers, sisters, aunts and cousins to the second and third degrees made up only the basic group. To them were added all the officials and the dignitaries of the Commonwealth and to these all the farmers, the hired hands, the gay lasses, the beggars, the worthy poor, the prostitutes, the Indian medicine men, acrobats, players, artisans and peddlers of the Province. The whole Common was covered with booths selling cakes, wine, rum, candy, toys and gimcracks, with tents of jugglers, and a tent for dancing. By nightfall the Common was strewn with watermelon rinds, peach stones and scraps of paper, the air spiced with the odor of rum and wine and tobacco and hot, unwashed bodies.

The academic ceremony was very nearly overwhelmed by the subsidiary activities, but the arrival of the Governor and the appearance of the scholars in their gowns, making their way in procession to the meeting-house, insured it of the center of the stage for a few hours at least. The new bachelors of art came first, two in a row, and then the masters of art. Next came the formidable figure of the President, walking alone, then the corporation and the tutors, two by two, then the Honorable Governor and Council and finally "the rest of the gentlemen."

In the meeting-house there was a brief service and then the delivery of the theses, in Latin, by the most notable scholars. Finally, as an innovation, an English oration which closed the exercises. The "commencers" then removed to their chambers to entertain family and friends with wine, punch, plum cake and other delicacies, procured in town or brought painstakingly from distant homes by frugal parents. The scholars were often as intemperate as the townfolk and one observer noted "The college have been chiefly in company a-drinking today and at night—they seem to be all drunkenness and confusion."[7]

One talented undergraduate commemorated the day in verse:

See! how the dripping Throngs trip o'er the Plains,
The nut-brown Country Nymphs and rural Swains. . . .
While some intoxicated are with Wine,
Others (as brutish) propagate their Kind. . . .
Thus the loose Crowd forbidden Pleasures seek,
Drink HARVARD dry, and so conclude the Week.

John Adams was among those whose talents were displayed at the crowded commencement exercises in the meeting-house. The Reverend Thaddeus Maccarty, minister of Worcester, had been commissioned by the selectmen of that town to choose a new schoolmaster. He was taken by the earnestness and the eloquence of Senior Sophister Adams and engaged him on the spot.

III

THE TOWN of Worcester lay some fifty miles west and south of Boston. In 1755 it contained about fifteen hundred souls. Larger than Braintree, it had, as the principal town in the central part of the state and as a stopover on the much-traveled road to New York, a decidedly urban, almost cosmopolitan air about it. The fashionable doctrines of the French Deists—Voltaire and his followers—had reached Worcester and won a number of adherents. Among the middle-class citizens of the town there was a lively consciousness of political and theological issues.

But John Adams' first appraisal of the community was not a flattering one. To a young Harvard sophisticate it seemed a dull spot and he complained aloofly in a letter to a classmate of "dry disputes upon politics, and rural obscene wit."[1] At Harvard his dreams had taken in "gay gorgeous prospects" and the practicalities of the life of a poorly paid pedagogue in a remote town dashed his spirits. "Hope has left me," he wrote gloomily to his cousin and classmate, Nathan Webb. His ambitious plans for study and self-improvement were inhibited by his duties as schoolmaster. "Every week day is sacrificed," he added. He was, moreover, disheartened by the persistence in the Worcester meeting of the doctrines of "frigid John Calvin."[2]

It was as a schoolmaster that John Adams had come to Worcester and his pupils absorbed the greater part of his time and energy. Toward them his feelings were mixed. Since his plans reached far beyond the confines of a small-town schoolroom, he complained of it as "a school of affliction," and deplored the "large number of little runtlings, just capable of lisping A B C, and troubling the master." He felt sure that keeping school any length of time "would make a base weed and ignoble shrub of me."[3] But John was conscientious and the recollection of his own boredom and restlessness under the rule of Joseph Cleverly induced him to make special efforts to give his charges, some of them but little younger than their mentor, a taste of the true excitement of learning. Impatient and demanding with himself, he tried to be sympathetic with his pupils, to lead rather than to drive them through their lessons. Twenty is not by nature inclined to be understanding of thirteen, but John, with his intensity, his quickness of observation and his wit, found ways to transcend the time-honored routines of the classroom. In the spirit of an attentive and scientific pedagogue, he made "repeated experiments" to discover how his scholars might best absorb their Caesar or master ciphering. He came thereby to the not especially novel conclusion "that human nature is more easily wrought upon and governed by promises and encouragement and praise than by punishment, and threatening and blame." But he also noted that praise, to be effective, must be used sparingly, "lest it become too familiar and cheap and so contemptible." Physical chastisements and punishments that subject the student to the ridicule of his companions "depress the spirits, but commendation enlivens and stimulates them to a noble ardor and emulation."[4]

As his pupils daydreamed on occasion so did their master. Sometimes in his "great chair at school," he considered himself "as some dictator at the head of a commonwealth," and imagined his pupils as subjects of his empire. "I have," he wrote, "several renowned generals but three feet high, and several deep-projecting politicians in petticoats; I have others catching and dissecting flies, accumulating remarkable pebbles, cockle shells etc., with as ardent curiosity as any virtuoso in the Royal Society." He observed at one desk a youthful dandy, "foppling and fluttering . . . playing with his fingers as gaily and wittily as any frenchified coxcomb brandishes his cane or rattles his snuff-box." At another sat a juvenile divine "plodding and wrangling in his mind about 'Adam's fall in which we sinned all,' as his Primer has it." His school was thus, like the great world, "made up of kings, politicians, divines . . . fops, buffoons, fiddlers, sycophants, fools, coxcombs, chimney sweepers, and every other character drawn in history or seen in the world." Over his miniature kingdom he ruled as a benevolent despot, bestowing praise and blame, punishing the unworthy and rewarding the virtuous, doing his best to drive from "tender mind [s] everything that is mean and little." For the moment the school seemed not at all tedious; indeed the world could offer John no greater pleasure than teaching. He had rather "sit in school and consider which of my pupils will turn out in his future life a hero, and which a rake, which a philosopher, and which a parasite," than have an income of a thousand pounds a year to spend in a life of idle amusement.[5]

Yet his moods were changeable and at other times he bewailed, "the mischievous tricks, the perpetual, invincible prate, and the stupid dulness of my scholars, [which] aroused my passions, and with them my views and impatience of ambition."[6]

The years that he kept school in Worcester were decisive years in the life of John Adams. He was full of wild impatience, of restless ambition, of doubts and uncertainties, of an insatiable appetite for life, full of the power of love, full of awe and wonder and egoism. To a young man of twenty the world is an extraordinary place, even in Worcester, Massachusetts. He stands naked before it, painfully aware of his nakedness, touchy, passionate, self-conscious, defiant, hungry for praise and approbation, pierced by the beauty of nature, amazed at the staggering immensity and variety of the universe. He has not time enough to devour the feast set before him—the books, the places, the sights, the people, the ideas. He seeks to solve the riddle of the ages in weeks or months, pressed by a feeling of terrible urgency. He must wrestle through the night with the angel of the Lord, seize and subdue Beauty and Truth, crack open the dense kernel of life and pick its sweetest meats. He must dazzle and delight with his wit and brilliance. And at the same time he endures torments of loneliness, and is touchingly grateful to those who notice that he exists, who endure his moodiness, his brashness and self-assertion, his dogmatism and cocksureness. He is obsessed by the problem of meaning in life but expects to solve it shortly. He is alternately transported by the feeling that he is destined to blaze a startling path through life dazzling all onlookers, and cast down by the conviction that he must live a life of humble obscurity. His judgments are harsh as those of Rhadamanthus, but he can weep over a sunset or the unrecognized beauty of his own soul. He combines those unattractive qualities of dogmatism and sentimentality and we can, at least in theory and if we do not have to endure them too directly, excuse all these things because he is open to life. It is for him a thing of heartbreaking beauty and wonder, vivid beyond expressing, painful beyond enduring. Such and so are young men of twenty if they are true young men and such and so was John Adams. If we did not know we could have guessed it, but we know because he tells us so. A few months after his arrival in Worcester, he began his remarkable diary. To it he committed week by week his hopes and doubts, his speculations upon God and man, his ambitions and his prospects.

With frequent interruptions he kept the diary for thirty years, critical years in his own growth and development and in that of Massachusetts and its sister colonies in British America. The diary, as his son John Quincy Adams said in latter years, revealed a "self-examination at once severe and stimulative" and, he might have added, characteristically Puritan, along with shrewd and often biting comments on the men and events with which John Adams was involved.

From the diary we know of Adams' unappeasable hunger, hunger for knowledge that set him to devouring half a dozen books at a time, going from one to another like a gourmand at a feast, that set him talking, wildly and extravagantly, that drove him back to his books to gulp down great undigested hunks of Tillotson or Bolingbroke or Milton or Shakespeare; then out to the woods and fields around Worcester, then bursting into a friend's rooms to propose tea and the renewal of hot debate upon a mooted point of theology, and finally back to his quarters to reproach himself for fickleness and extravagance, for folly and vanity, and to make new resolutions for close application to a strict regimen.

John Adams soon found he did not have to rust in Worcester. The town had its own polite society, its intelligentsia, its middle-class radicals. As a Harvard graduate and schoolmaster John Adams had entree to such circles. Colonel John Chandler was Worcester's counterpart to Colonel Quincy of Braintree and he and his hospitable family took the young teacher in. The Colonel was a robust, florid man who delighted in argument. Addicted to extreme statements and farfetched propositions, he quite lost himself in heated discussion.

The Reverend Thaddeus Maccarty, who, as agent of the selectmen, had chosen John Adams, was pastor of the first parish of Worcester. He was suspected of belonging, in heart at least, to the New Lights, the religious enthusiasts who had caught fire from Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. John, who liked and admired him, noted in his diary that the pastor's favorite words in his lengthy Sabbath sermons were "carnal, ungodly persons. Sensuality and voluptuousness. Walking with God. Unregeneracy.–Rebellion against God . . . Solid, substantial and permanent joys. Joys springing up in the soul."[7] Mr. Maccarty was often party to those conversations which John Adams found so stimulating and whose main points were recorded faithfully in his diary.

Lawyer James Putnam was another member of the town's intelligentsia. A volatile and rather indolent man, he preferred debating points of theology with the new schoolmaster to writing briefs or drawing writs; he was, nonetheless, an able advocate with a special flair for courtroom forensics. Like others in the town Putnam had been infected with the new doctrines of Deism and in debate with John he held out against the idea of a future state of rewards and punishments. Religion was indeed, he maintained, "mere delusion," an ingenious construct of man hungry for meaning. Similarly the apostles were simply "a company of enthusiasts" like the fanatics who raised such a storm in the great awakening of religion which had swept most of the colonies in recent years. He pointed out that "we have only their word to prove that they spoke with different tongues, raised the dead and healed the sick. . . ." Such heresies John strove earnestly to extirpate, noting shrewdly that Putnam, in his heart, wished to have his skepticism overthrown.[8]

Dr. Nahum Willard was the physician of Worcester and the Willards' house, like the Chandlers', was always open to John. There were two Willard boys near his own age. The doctor encouraged John's interest in medicine by turning him loose among his medical books, and the doctor's attractive wife attempted to cure him of chewing tobacco.

Outside, in more ways than one, of the little circle of congenial spirits whose company John Adams so enjoyed, he encountered three sharp dissenters from the religious and political orthodoxies of the community. Ephraim Doolittle and Nathan Baldwin were excluded from the group that controlled the affairs of Worcester, but Adams found them stimulating companions. They were "great readers of Deistical books, and very great talkers." Equality and Deism were their cardinal principles. Aligned with them was Joseph Dyer, who kept a town shop. Dyer was a classic small-town eccentric. An outspoken anti-Trinitarian, he had let most of the leaders of the town in church and state feel the rasp of his rough wit. The Antichrist was, he insisted, all forms of rank and distinction in society. "A perfect equality of suffrage was essential to liberty," was his outrageous doctrine. John expostulated with him, raising the question "of women, of children, of idiots, of madmen, of criminals, of prisoners for debt or for crimes," but Dyer remained adamant. "An entire level of power, property, consideration were essential to Liberty and would be introduced and established in the millennium." Despite such political and religious heterodoxy John passed many pleasant evenings in company with the three since, as he put it, "they were readers and thinking men."[9]

With the self-absorption of the young, John spent much of his time thinking about himself, about his present and his future. He realized that he was inordinately ambitious. He must be a person of consequence in this world which so much obsessed his thoughts. And he could be so only by constant application to his studies, by choosing a profession and then excelling in it through energy, enterprise and study. He certainly did not intend to spend his life as a Worcester schoolmaster. The question was should he be a preacher, lawyer or doctor? It was his parents' wish that he become a Congregational minister, but the angry contentions over doctrine that resounded through New England in the middle years of the eighteenth century made him disinclined to embark on a career where his own opinions would be constantly under scrutiny and where his entire career might be endangered by any deviations from orthodoxy, or what a majority of his congregation considered to be such. Medicine attracted him, in part because of his interest in science. He became a boarder in Dr. Willard's home and busied himself in the doctor's library.

His principal preoccupations were theology—the nature of the universe and God's relation to it; and the reaction of others to him (was he liked, popular, beloved, or vain and utterly repulsive?). In theology, he was bent on steering a course between skepticism and Deism on one side and Calvinist orthodoxy on the other. The order, discipline and ritual of the Roman and the English churches he found instinctively distasteful. "Where," he asked his diary, "do we find a precept in the Gospel requiring Ecclesiastical Synods? Convocations? Councils? Decrees? Creeds? Confessions? Oaths? Subscriptions? and whole cart-loads of other trumpery that we find religion encumbered with in these days?" He was thoroughly protestant in his conviction that the final measure of religion was the conscience of the individual. Christianity was the source of morality, of all acceptable ideas of virtue, of justice, decency and civil order. With theological subtleties he had little patience. It was not intended to make men "good riddle solvers or good mystery-mongers, but good men, good magistrates and good subjects, good husbands and good wives, good parents and good children, good masters and good servants."[10]

There were few if any in Worcester to dispute such a formulation. The debate came over whether God was an active force in the universe, directing and superintending the operation of His natural laws and the particular destinies of men, or whether, as the Deists argued, He was simply the designer and builder of the universe—the "First Cause," the Prime Mover, who, having put together a system of infinite complexity, wound it up, so to speak, and left it to run by the mechanical principles which He had devised for its proper functioning. This view, moreover, left in doubt, if it did not entirely banish, any concept of life after death, or a future state of punishments and rewards. John Adams was as determined to hold to the reality of a personal God and life beyond death as he was to eschew Calvinism's insistence on predestination, infant damnation, election, and other tenets held in strictest observance by his Braintree forebears.

Astronomers had revealed the existence of innumerable planets in the universe. Furthermore, they had made it known "that not only all the planets and satellites in our solar system, but all the unnumbered worlds that revolve round the fixed stars are inhabited, as well as this globe of earth."[11] Such a possibility posed a difficult question for the faithful. When John Adams struggled with it he found his principal resource in the seventeenth-century Anglican theologian, Tillotson. John copied into his commonplace book long passages from Tillotson's writings and adopted as his own the Englishman's speculations about the inhabitants of "other globes" in the solar system. Man cannot even argue about the relationship of such beings to God, he wrote, until "it is proved at least probable that all these species of rational beings have revolted from their rightful sovereign." When he examined "the little prospect" that lay before him and then considered the "infinite variety of bodies in one horizon of perhaps two miles diameter" "he was overwhelmed at the thought of how many millions of such prospects there are upon the surface of this earth, how many millions of globes there are within our view, each of which has as many of these prospects upon its own surface as our planet." His conviction of God's existence he drew primarily from the extraordinary variety and beauty of the observable world—"the amazing harmony of our solar system . . . the stupendous plan of operation" designed by God to act a particular role "in this great and complicated drama."

As the citizen of a world whose horizons were expanding with an astonishing rapidity, John Adams was, perhaps, as impressed by the achievements of man as by the omnipotence of God. Man had found ways, with remarkable ingenuity, to augment or alter the world that had been given him. He could level mountains, dig out valleys, clear forests, and assist nature in her own productions. By pruning the trees and manuring the land, he enables the farmer to produce "larger and fairer fruit . . . and better and greater plenty of grain. . . . The telescope has settled the regions of heaven, and the microscope has brought up to view innumberable millions of animals that escape the observation of our naked sight." And all this God had in view from all eternity—"intimately and perfectly [He] knew the nature and all the properties of all these His creatures. He looked forward through all duration and perfectly knew all the effects, all the events and revolutions, that could possibly and would actually take place throughout eternity."[12]

"What now can preserve this prodigious variety of species and this inflexible uniformity among the individuals," he asked, "but the continual and vigilant providence of God?" Such a God could "easily suspend those laws whenever His providence sees sufficient reason for such suspension. This can be no objection, then, to the miracles of Jesus Christ." Ancient philosophers, wise as they might have been, had been unable to overcome "prejudice, custom, passion, and bigotry." But God through Christ awakened men to truth.[13]

These were the poles of his thinking: the nature of God and His universe; the life and destiny of John Adams. How could he best prepare for the career he would eventually choose; how create those habits of mind and that "settled disposition" which would provide the foundations for worldly success; that, and the choice of a career itself. From the first, he confined his constant doubts to his diary. "Oh!" he wrote, "that I could wear out of my mind every mean and base affectation; conquer my natural pride and self conceit, expect no more deference from my fellows than I deserve, acquire that meekness and humility which are the sure mark and characters of a great and generous soul, and subdue every unworthy passion. . . . How happy should I then be in the favor and good will of all honest men and the sure prospect of a happy immortality. . . . What is the proper business of mankind in this life?" he asked himself in another diary entry. From the perspective of twenty it seemed that misery and happiness were in more or less equal proportions. Yet man pursued through a long life "shadows, and empty but glittering phantoms rather than substances . . . honor, or wealth, or learning or some other such delusive trifle." Contemplation of God, "habits of love and compassion . . . habits of temperance, recollection, and self-government" were the things that would afford "real and substantial pleasure" and give "the prospect of everlasting felicity."[14]

As he began his second year of schoolteaching, Adams wrote in his diary, "I am resolved not to neglect my time as I did last year. I am resolved to rise with the sun and to study the Scriptures on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings, and to study some Latin author the other three mornings. Noons and nights I intend to read English authors. This is my fixed determination, and I will set down every neglect and every compliance with this resolution. May I blush whenever I suffer one hour to pass unimproved. I will rouse up my mind and fix my attention. I will stand collected within myself and think upon what I read and what I see. I will strive with all my soul to be something more than persons who have had less advantages than myself."[15]

But the next day he despaired for his good resolves. Instead of rising at four and pursuing his study of St. James' Gospel, he lay abed like a sluggard till seven and noted despondently in his diary: "This is the usual fate of my resolutions."

In the little world of Worcester John sought to shine, aiming at "wit and spirit," showing off his learning, taking issue with "persons much superior to myself in years and place," criticizing the intelligence, manners or behavior of his fellow townspeople, exercising his talent for satire and invective. He carried his dismay again to his diary with fresh assurances of reform and the expressed determination "to labor more for an inoffensive and amiable than for a shining and invidious character." Inoffensive and amiable, humble and meek John Adams would never be, but to the end of a long life he never stopped trying. Every defeat stirred him to new self-exhortation.

He was determined not "to leave one passion unsubdued." Sometimes for days at a stretch the good resolutions were faithfully observed. July of 1756 was such a period. In his diary he noted:

"26. Monday. Rose at seven; read carefully thirty lines in Virgil.

"27. Tuesday. . . . Read carefully thirty lines in Virgil. Wrote a little in Bolingbroke at noon, and a little at night. Spent the evening at Mr. Putnam's.

"28. Wednesday. Read about forty lines in Virgil and wrote a little at noon. Nothing more.

"29. Thursday. Rose at half after six; read a little Greek."

[Then the collapse.]

"30. Friday. A very rainy day. Dreamed away the time."[16]

So were his resolutions "of a very thin and vapory consistency." The interior dialogue that John Adams carried on ceaselessly with himself, and whose intimations he confined to his diary, was balanced, as we have seen, by the debates, discussions and conversations with the good company of the town. With Chandler, Putnam, Willard, and Maccarty, Adams soared. It was intoxicating to a twenty-year-old to find that he could hold his own with these older men, learned in their professions and experienced in the matters of the practical world. With them the talk turned often to politics.

Worcester was dramatically reminded of the mighty events moving the outside world. Lord Loudoun, British commander of His Majesty's forces against the French, stopping on his way to Boston from New York, made a poor impression on the townsfolk of Worcester. They were not happy at the thought that their fate might be in the hands of such a frivolous, foppish character. The bold and dashing Lord Howe, stopping off in his turn, raised their spirits again. Then Lord Jeffrey Amherst with four thousand smart and well-trained soldiers passed through town on his way to drive the French and Indians out of Fort William Henry. Amherst and his handsomely accoutered officers charmed the Worcesterians. The whole town turned out to see the kilted Scotsmen in their bright plaids and even judged their bagpipe music "not disagreeable." So grand strategy and imperial relations competed with theology for the attention of John Adams and his friends. John Adams wrote his cousin Nathan Webb, "This whole town is immersed in politics."

The relations between the colonies and the mother country were of special concern for they touched the interests of every American. John Adams, tracing the rise and fall of civilizations, observed that history recorded a number of nations which had risen "from contemptible beginnings" to spread their influence, "till the whole globe is subjected to their sway. When they have reached the summit of grandeur, some minute and unsuspected cause commonly effects their ruin, and the empire of the world is transferred to some other place."

So it was with Rome and so, in time, it may be with England, now "the greatest nation upon the globe." England had lost a handful of its citizens, for reasons of conscience, to a wild and unsettled continent. Perhaps, he reflected, writing to Nathan Webb, "this apparently trivial incident may transfer the great seat of empire into America." Indeed this seemed likely to Adams, for if the threat of a French Canada was once removed, America, within a hundred years, would be more heavily populated than the mother country. The only way in fact "to keep us from setting up for ourselves is to disunite us. *Divide et impera.* Keep us in distinct colonies, and then, some great men in each colony desiring the monarchy of the whole, they will destroy each other's influence and keep the country in *equilibrio.*"[17]

The uncertainty about the choice of a profession added to Adams' restlessness. He wrote in the spring of 1756 to Charles Cushing, a Harvard classmate, reviewing the professions and confessing his indecision. The lawyer serves his novitiate "fumbling and racking amidst the rubbish of writs . . . pleas, ejectments . . . and a 1000 other lignum vitae words that have neither harmony or meaning," and when he enters the practice of his profession, "he often foments more quarrels than he composes—and enriches himself at the expense of impoverishing others more honest and deserving than himself." While the study of the law is an avenue to political office and service for the state, success depends too much on wealth and family, "not to mention capacity which I have not." On the other hand, the skilled doctor will have no business "while the bungler will kill more than he cures." As for the preacher, he has not only his own prejudices to combat but "the caprices, humours and fancies of the vulgar to submit to; poverty to struggle with; the charge of heresy to bear; [and] systematical divinity, alias systematical vexation of spirit." On the more positive side, a minister has "more leisure to inform his mind—to subdue his passions—fewer temptations of intemperance and injustice."[18]

Despite his eloquent account of the hazards of the law, John, in the months that followed, drifted toward that profession. He attended the sessions of the Court of Common Pleas and there was fascinated by the drama of the courtroom. The lawyers with their knowing ways, their air of being privy to special mysteries, their skill in debate, their ready evocation of Lords Coke, Mansfield or Bacon, of Cicero or Horace if the occasion offered, made a deep impression on the young schoolmaster. He envied his friend Putnam the role he played on this larger stage before the justices of the Province and their retinue of lawyers riding the circuit with them. He noted especially the skill with which Putnam, simply by the expression on his long, mobile face, indicated to the jurors his skepticism about the testimony of an opposing witness. His "look of contempt" was more eloquent than words; his sly smile could cut as sharply as a swordsman's riposte. The courtroom scene was like a play: it had its leading actors—knowing, confident men—its supporting cast of litigants and witnesses, its suspense, its climaxes, its denouements. Even a simple case of trespass could reveal a whole tangled web of envy, malice and revenge. Most attractive of all to John Adams were the historical and intellectual dimensions of the law—the way it led from precedent to precedent, drawing from history, philosophy and theology, buttressed by opinions, learned and ingenious, to erect a structure marvelous in its intricacy. In it could be traced the story of man's long struggle from savagery to a stable social order, the contest against the capricious whims of a monarch or the blind and destructive force of popular prejudice. Law could thus be read as a *précis* of man's fight for security of life, liberty and property. It must, after all, be the law. Regardless of the "many difficulties and discouragements," John was "irresistibly impelled" to put his feet on the path. He went up to Putnam when the court had adjourned. He had not money to pay his fee but he would give a promissory note for the amount. If he could lodge with the Putnams he would pay them what the town allowed him for his room and board and serve his apprenticeship. To the lethargic Putnam, the opportunity to acquire such an energetic apprentice was tempting. He secured his wife's consent and the matter was settled. Thus, by the summer of 1756, Adams had had enough of schoolteaching, but he decided to continue it for two more years to support himself while he studied law with Putnam. Lawyer Putnam's instruction was highly permissive. He left his young apprentice to follow his own course. His mentor's modest library contained "the most essential law books." Adams made his way through Sir Edward Colke's *Institutes of the Laws of England,* William Hawkins' *A Treatise of the Pleas of the Crown,* and Sir Matthew Hale's *History . . . of the Common Law of England,* among others. Without guidance much was wasted. He read too fast, swallowing large ill-digested portions that gave him little nourishment. But he followed the court sessions closely, wrote simple writs for his master, searched precedents, and in this manner absorbed the rudiments of practical law in a country town.

Launched on his professional training, accepted in the community, settled in his religious convictions, John found a kind of precarious equilibrium. He was still subject to fits of despondency and self-reproach but they were less frequent and less acute. He remained passionate and headstrong as ever and his ambition to excel drove him relentlessly day in and day out. But he yielded less often to impulse, spent less time less time daydreaming or thrusting his way through the woods and fields around Worcester. The cosmic questions, at least for the moment, gave way to the drawing of writs and pleas, the unraveling of torts, and the drafting of briefs.

It was in these years at Worcester that Adams was assailed by the first of a long succession of ailments. Riding to Shrewsbury, to attend the wedding of his friend Joshua Willard to a belle of that town, he caught a bad cold. Its passing left him weak and achey. Dr. Willard diagnosed his trouble as due to his "close application to a school and to studies by night and by day" which had "corrupted the whole mass of my blood and juices." For this alarming condition, the doctor prescribed the latest and most fashionable treatment—a milk diet. John must renounce "all meat and spirits" and live upon "bread and milk, vegetables and water." The patient improved, the headaches subsided but severe heartburn plagued him and could only be relieved by "large potions of tea." For years John followed the spartan diet. It marked indeed the beginning of a constant concern with his health.

In the fall of 1758 the agreed-upon period of John's apprenticeship with Putnam expired. He was, in his own estimation, far from being a trained lawyer, but he had picked up what he could from the rather meager store of a provincial practitioner. He was impatient to move on and augment his legal knowledge from the richer resources of Boston's leading advocates. But before he left Worcester, his radical friends, Doolittle and Baldwin, came to propose that he remain in Worcester. They would undertake to get him elected Register of Deeds at the forthcoming election and with the assured income of this office he could contest the Chandler rule. The Chandlers had "engrossed almost all the public offices in the town and country," and the two men trying to fight the Colonel's domination of the community hoped to recruit the talented young lawyer for their camp. John Adams took a different view of the matter. Putnam, his mentor, was married to one of the Chandler daughters; the family had shown him many kindnesses; they were able and responsible in the discharge of their offices and he had no impulse to depose them. In John's opinion Colonel Chandler of Worcester, like Colonel Quincy of Braintree, justified his pre-eminence in the town by the quality of his leadership.

In addition John felt that the matter of his dubious health demanded consideration. He had already undertaken the dreary regimen of his restricted diet. He longed for the sea breezes and "the pure zephyrs from the rocky mountains of my native town." His mother and father had invited him to live with them; and finally, there had never been a bona fide lawyer in Braintree or its adjacent towns. The legal business of rural Suffolk was divided between a swarm of Boston lawyers (a number of whom followed the court on circuit) and local amateurs—sheriffs and constables for the most part—who carried on a kind of part-time, makeshift legal activity as an extension of their offices. John Adams was determined to try his luck in his home town.

IV

When John Adams returned to Braintree, he had been away, not counting frequent visits, for almost eight years. He had left the town a boy of fifteen; he returned a man of twenty-three. He had no illusions about the prospects ahead of him. The town, he knew, would be of two minds about him. There was pride in the return of a native son, a graduate of Harvard, a trained lawyer, by all reports a bright and able young man. His father's position in the community guaranteed him a measure of attention and respect; his Harvard degree identified him as a gentleman and entitled him to have "Esquire" appended to his name. This was on the credit side. To the debit must be charged a small town's suspicion of lawyers as a class—one might even say a caste. They were at best, in the view of most of Braintree, a necessary evil. With their sharp ways, with their intricate and obscure writs and pleadings, their forms and formalities, their often condescending manners, they could trick a man out of his shirt or out of his farm before he knew it. And they were especially resented by the local politicos and legal amateurs who wished to keep whatever litigation could be found (or encouraged) in the town as a source of personal profit. Adams protested in his diary "these dirty and ridiculous litigations" which have been multiplied until "the very earth groans and the stones cry out." "As litigious as Braintree," he noted wryly, had become a proverb. The pettifoggers encouraged and battened on contention and did their best to promote "an idle, brawling, wrangling temper."

Beyond this was the fact that Braintree lay well within the shadow of the Boston bar. Once you had numbered the unchallenged masters of the profession—Jeremiah Gridley, Oxenbridge Thacher, Benjamin Prat and James Otis—there were dozens of able, well-trained young attorneys fighting like sharks for whatever legal business might be thrown their way. The competition was merciless. Friends, family, money, political influence—all these were counters in the game. The brutal fact was that there were more lawyers than livings to be made. There were a dozen young barristers John Adams' age practicing law in Boston who were as far as he from making a living at their vocation, and John Adams was in a poor position to compete with most of them. The majority of them had been trained and were sponsored by leaders of the city's bar and had, in addition, wealthy and influential friends and connections. Always prone to dramatize his own position and early wedded to the image of himself as a poor and relatively friendless but bright and ambitious youth, John noted these facts in his diary. And along with his careful calculation of the odds against him, he recorded, self-consciously, his own determination to succeed though the wealth, influence, power and position of the Commonwealth might be arrayed against him.

Established in his father's house, he must, in order to win by his personal qualities what he could not claim by family or influence, gain formal admission to the bar as a practicing attorney, and finally carry forward his training as a lawyer, begun but by no means completed in Worcester. A lawyer at the start of his career must have patronage, infinite patience, frugal habits and a measure of luck. He must wait for litigants to seek him out; he must build his practice by degrees, a client at a time, gaining two and losing one disgruntled at the outcome of a suit, until finally, after years of labor and uncertainty, he might have the satisfaction of living, poorly or well, off his fees.

From the first Adams determined to seek the support of Jeremiah Gridley, "father of the bar" in Boston, a man full of years and legal lore. As a young man, Gridley, like Adams, had been intended for the ministry, had taught school in Boston and then turned to the law. When Adams approached him the old lawyer was the acknowledged dean of the Massachusetts bar, one who had done much to raise an often dubious trade to a profession of dignity and growing importance. Grand Master of the Free Masons, colonel of militia, he was an impressive figure—John later noted his "majestic manner," his "stiffness and affectation," as well as his quickness and imagination.

Having fortified himself with Justinian's *Institutes* and Gilbert *On Feuds and Feudal Tenures*, Adams went up to Boston late in October to solicit the patronage and advice of Gridley. How should he proceed to the practice of law? he asked. "Get sworn," the older man replied. But he had studied with Putnam in Worcester and had no patron in Suffolk County. Well then, Gridley himself would sponsor him when the court convened. But first he must quiz him on his training. What plan of study had he followed and what books had he read? Vinnius' Notes on Justinian's *Institutes*, John said proudly. Gridley was obviously impressed. "Where did you find that work? Mr. Putnam had it not, I believe, and I know of no other copy than my own, in the country."

"I borrowed it, sir," Adams replied, "from the Harvard College Library, by the aid of a friend."

"Vinnius is a commentator more suitable for persons of more advanced age and longer research than yours," Gridley said. "I can lend you books better adapted to youth: follow me and I will show you something." John followed him up the narrow steps to a "very handsome library" containing an impressive array of writers on civil and canon law, on the laws of nature and the laws of nations. Gridley showed Adams his own commonplace book with Lord Matthew Hale's advice to a student of the common law, and similar advice from Lord Chief Justice Reeve to his nephew; and then a letter from the regius professor of law at the University of Cambridge, suggesting a method of studying civil law; and finally, a plan of his own for mastering admiralty law. He would lend John from his own library whatever lawbooks he wished to study.

The American lawyer, Gridley pointed out, had a more arduous task than his British counterpart. The latter was, invariably, a specialist whereas the American must master the whole range of law. He must study "common and civil law, and natural law, and admiralty law; and [he] must do the duty of a counselor, a lawyer, an attorney, a solicitor" and even a clerk.

"I have a few pieces of advice to give you, Mr. Adams," said the older lawyer at the conclusion of their meeting. "One is to pursue the study of the law, rather than the gain of it. Pursue the gain of it enough to keep out of the briers, but give your main attention to the study of it. The next is not to marry early. For an early marriage will obstruct your improvement, and in the next place, it will involve you in expense."

He must likewise, in his monkish regimen, avoid too much company. The law must be his mistress and a demanding one. The common law should be his first and deepest study and here he must concentrate on Sir Edward Coke's *Institutes*. "You must conquer the *Institutes!*" the lawyer added emphatically. "He has conquered all the difficulties of this law, who is master of the *Institutes.*" Gridley looked at his watch. "Well, you have detained me here the whole forenoon, and I must go to court. The court will adjourn to the last Friday in this month. Do you attend in the morning and I will present you to the court to be sworn."[1]

From Gridley's home the two went on to court and John Adams spent the rest of the day listening to lawyers argue cases. The conversation with Gridley made a deep impression on him and he renewed his pledges to be a dutiful scholar. In the evening of the same day, he went on to Oxenbridge Thacher's house to ask his "concurrence." Thacher, who had studied with Gridley, was equally cordial to the young lawyer. Some fifteen years older than Adams, he was a man of unusual charm. He, again like Gridley, had prepared at Harvard for the ministry and turned to law. Despite his eminence he was simple and unassuming, although John found him "not easy" to talk to. His great personal popularity doubtless stemmed from his warmth and sympathy. John noted that his emotions were "easily touched, his shame, his compassion, his fear, his anger." His voice was low—"small," Adams called it—but it had a "musical eloquence" that was thoroughly engaging. Thin and frail, he showed on occasion a blazing intensity and a surprising force. At the lawyer's home, Adams was made part of a congenial company and spent the evening drinking tea and discussing original sin, the nature of evil, the plan of the universe and, finally, law.

The following morning John went to see Benjamin Prat, the third member of the legal quartet who dominated the Boston bar. Prat's career was a notable success story. He was the son of a "mechanic" and destined to follow his father's trade, but when eighteen he had fallen from an apple tree and broken a leg so badly that it had to be amputated. Unable to support himself as a workman, Prat went to Harvard, after graduation married Isabella Auchmuty, daughter of the Admiralty Judge, read law with Gridley, and became in a few years a leader of the Massachusetts bar. He was gruff and impatient with the young lawyer who approached him. Had Adams been sworn at the Worcester court? No. Did he have a letter from Putnam? Again the answer was no. Well, those were the proper first steps. He had heard Adams well spoken of, to be sure, but that was only hearsay. Following a curt dismissal, John "came off full of wrath" at such an ungracious reception and went off for another day at court, determined to soak up what he could of the best practice. He might well have forgiven Prat's rudeness had he known that the old lawyer suffered almost continual agony from his severed stump. Before very long the young Adams came to have enormous respect for the strange, mutilated little man who had been so peremptory with him.

That evening John sought out James Otis, the lawyer whom Putnam had ranked first among the great figures of the Boston bar. The meeting was a fateful one. There was a vividness, a force and vivacity about Otis that attracted Adams at once. He radiated a kind of reckless vitality, a restlessness, a sense of barely restrained violence that answered to qualities in Adams' own character. The most notable difference in the two men was perhaps that Adams' mind kept a perpetual watch on the reckless impulses of his heart, while in Otis they ran unchecked. Brilliant and unstable, often not far from madness, his passions shook him like a storm. This was part of the charism, the possession of the spirit, that drew men to him like filings to a magnet. Demon-ridden, often brutally sarcastic, friends as well as enemies felt the lash of his tongue; but everything was forgiven by those who loved him, for his words lit up the mind's dark sky like rockets. Men listened to the hurrying, nasal voice in a trance; he disturbed their bowels and agitated the humors of their blood. The encounter was the beginning of Adams' only real discipleship. Otis soon came to be both friend and inspiration, his instructor in the extraordinary game of politics (although never a model, for in the older man John recognized traits he sought to subdue in himself), and more—a preceptor and guide; Adams would always think him, Washington aside, the greatest man he had ever met. Their conversation was a brief one, but Otis "with great ease and familiarity promised me to join the bar in recommending me to the court."

Satisfied, John went back to Braintree to await the opening of the Superior Court; there, lapsing into the pleasant round of town life, he "smoked, chatted, trifled . . . loitered" and "what is worse" "gallanted" the girls. He slighted his studies to immerse himself in the routines of his father's farm, "unpitching" a load of hay, splitting wood, picking and munching apples, drinking tea, flirting discreetly with Dr. Elisha Savil's pretty wife and designing to read her Ovid's *Art of Love*, tramping over to Nathan Webb's to smoke another pipe and discuss the "nature of the human soul." He found ample source of self-reproach in a neighbor his own age whose thoughts were not, like Adams', "employed on songs and girls, nor his time on flutes, fiddles, concerts and card tables."

The anxieties that had dogged him in Worcester repossessed him. In Boston he encountered Robert Treat Paine, a friend from Harvard days and one of the number of young Boston lawyers struggling for a competence; together with Sam Quincy, the three reviewed their prospects. The discussion was not an encouraging one. Paine was convinced that he had ruined his health by his studies and now was too ailing for an "active life," yet not learned enough to pursue a legal career. Quincy was equally pessimistic—he would never make his mark in the world, either. Through his companions' gloomy prognostications Adams was silent, and Paine finally challenged him: "You don't intend to be a sage, I suppose?" It was indeed just what John did intend but he knew that to confess it would be to invite Paine's rough sarcasm, so he replied noncommittally. Later he spoke out in his diary: "Oh, Paine has not penetration to reach the bottom of my mind. He don't know me: Next time I will answer him, and say, 'A sage, no. Knowledge enough to keep out of fire and water is all that I aim at.'" As for Sam Quincy, his soul was afraid to aspire to greatness. It was Adams' appetite for the compelling immediacy of life, the crowding, diverting spectacle of man, that betrayed him from his studies. "Who can study in Boston streets?" he asked himself, and added, "I am unable to observe the various objects, that I meet, with sufficient precision. My eyes are so diverted with chimney sweeps, carriers of wood, merchants, ladies, priests, carts, horses, oxen, coaches, market men and women, soldiers, sailors, and my ears with the rattle gabble of them all that I can't think long enough in the street upon any one thing to start and pursue a thought. . . . My attention is solicited every moment by some new object of sight, or some new sound."[2]

Through the slow progress of his legal career sounded the interior dialogue. Self-conscious, cast in the conventional literary terms of the age, it was nonetheless searching and real for that. The dilemma was readily enough stated and indeed restated, again and again: it was simple happiness—"felicity"—or fame. Felicity was impossible "without an habitual contempt of fortune, fame, beauty, praise, and all such things." Benevolence and integrity were the proper supports of the happy man, the man with "an easy heart, a quiet mind." He, in his hunger for fame and success, distressed himself. "Oh! stoics, you are wise." Yet obviously enjoying the routines of town life—a sale at vendue, a hearing before the justice, a random conversation with one of the tribal elders—he comforted himself with the reflection that useful thoughts and queries arose "sooner in the world than in my study."

On the sixth of November John Adams rode up to Boston with Sam Quincy to be admitted to practice before the Superior Court, the formal port of entry into the profession for young attorneys. He went at once to Gridley's office but the clerk informed him that the venerable lawyer had not come back from a trip to Brookline. An hour later he returned to find him still absent. Back at the court, he began to grow uneasy. Oxenbridge Thacher could stand for Sam Quincy but how would he, John, be sworn in, in the absence of a patron to recommend him? When Adams at last had begun to despair Gridley bustled in, took his place, spotted John's anxious face in the court and began to whisper to his fellow lawyers. John heard Benjamin Prat say, with a sour look in his direction, "But nobody knows the fellow." "Yes," Gridley answered, "I have tried him, he is a very sensible fellow." Then he rose, bowed to his right, and said, "Mr. Quincy." Sam rose, and then Gridley bowed in turn to John, "Mr. Adams." The two friends stepped forward and their sponsor addressed the justices: "May it please your honors, I have two young gentlemen, Mr. Quincy and Mr. Adams, to present for the oath of an attorney. Of Mr. Quincy, it is sufficient for me to say he has lived three years with Mr. Prat. Of Mr. Adams, as he is unknown to your honors, it is necessary to say that he has lived between two and three years with Mr. Putnam of Worcester, has a good character from him and all others who know him, and that he was with me the other day several hours, and I take it he is qualified to study the law by his scholarship and that he has made a very considerable, a very great proficiency in the principles of the law, and therefore, that the client's interest may be safely intrusted in his hands. I therefore recommend him, with the consent of the bar, to your honors for the oath."

The clerk then swore in the two young men. The ceremony over, Jeremiah Gridley came up and shook John's hand warmly and "wished me much joy." He then introduced the younger man to the members of the bar who, by the accepted ritual, congratulated him; next Adams in turn invited them to step across the street to Stone's tavern, "where," as he noted, "the most of us resorted, and had a very cheerful chat." So it was done. John Adams was a fledgling lawyer. All he needed now was a client.[3]

Captain Eben Thayer and Captain Dick Bracket were the principal powers in Braintree below Colonel Quincy and John's own father. They were the political managers, the maneuverers, arrangers and schemers, and John set himself to observe them as closely as possible. What was their source of power? It was certainly not the rocklike integrity that distinguished the elder Adams or the Colonel. It seemed rather to come from their mastery of the small arts of politics; a general and unaffected affability, the knack for putting others into debt for small favors, a sharp sense of bargaining, an intimate knowledge of where every local skeleton was buried. Beyond this they were omnipresent. At every occasion of the town, at meeting-house, tavern, and training field they were much in evidence, offering "agreeable assistance in the tittletattle of the hour." John was determined to learn, if he could not emulate, their skills. So he observed them closely and continually in their rounds, marking their strengths and probing for their weaknesses. With these men and their adherents he must enter the lists if he was to have any considerable weight in the affairs of Braintree. He could not rival them in their shrewdness, their deft management, their cheerful conviviality. He could not make them like him, but he could win their respect by honest thumps; he could, at least in the law, overbear them by the superior force of his knowledge and by a sharper logic. If he could not match them in their exploitation of human frailties and foibles, he would be a more profound student of "the springs of human action"; he would learn to raise interest to the level of principle and so touch his fellow townsmen with a higher vision of man and his destiny than that within the view of Eben Thayer and Dick Bracket.

Meantime, not yet ready to engage them, he watched half admiring and half contemptuous as they moved expansively through their small world, a world that John, with a Harvard education, with one foot in Boston, had already transcended although it remained the center of his wider orbit.

To the circle of his intimates John added his cousin Zab Adams, who shared his mathematical interests. The two took rambles in the Blue Hills or walked over to Germantown to visit the Quincys. Zab and Richard Cranch, a young Englishman, recently moved to Braintree, became his closest friends. Cranch supplemented Zab's mathematical preoccupation with a strong mechanical bent. Adams felt, more and more, the pull of this life with its invitation to indolence, its minor but intense dramas, its small but persistent pleasures. He railed at his late risings and idle days spent in casual conversations and random readings. Magazines with their butterfly attention to a variety of subjects sipped up his time, time far better spent with Justinian or Lord Bacon. He could almost see Jeremiah Gridley's disapproving frown.

Despite such dissipations the law practice grew by small increments. John chased to Weymouth, to Boston, to Randolph and to Abington filing writs and hunting clients. He secured six actions and then, as an unexpected triumph, three new clients, all from Eben Thayer's own bailiwick.

The winter months in Braintree were thin months for legal matters. Men went to law when their blood warmed up and the Superior Court began its circuits. Adams found his way promptly into the little circle of Braintree's intelligentsia, as he had in Worcester. The Quincy household with young Samuel and Edmund was the center of the group. For John the "pert, sprightly, gay" Esther Quincy was another attraction. Joseph Cleverly, John's onetime schoolmaster, was a prominent if eccentric member, "cheerful, alert, sociable, and complaisant." The former pupil noted that he had never seen so much "good humor and contentment and so much poverty" together. Richard Cranch farmed and repaired clocks and added his quick mind and humor to the company. Luke Lambert was another member, a mordant, sarcastic man full of ridicule which more than once got under John Adams' tender skin. His victim compared Lambert to a "little knurly, ill-natured horse that kicks at every horse of his own size, but . . . sheers off from every one that is larger." Even so, Lambert was valued for his skill in discussion and his droll stories convulsed his companions.

Dr. Savil was the town doctor, a man whose greatest asset was his lively and attractive wife, at least in John's eyes. While he enjoyed the doctor's conversation, he scorned him for his small-town shrewdness, for neglecting his science to retail sugar by the pound, needles, tea, snuffboxes, pins, penknives and herbs, for making his poorer patients work out their fees. Thus the doctor, Adams noted sharply, "by practice of physic, by trading, and bargaining, and scheming," aimed "not at fame, only at a living and a fortune."

Parson Anthony Wibird, a most unpuritan minister, had a secure place in the circle by virtue of his office. He was orthodox enough in doctrine, but his manner was effeminate and "airy." Stuffed with stories and anecdotes of human foibles and follies, he loved to discourse on poetry, love, courtship, marriage, beauty and grace in what seemed to John a most frivolous spirit. John noted "he has a familiar, careless way of conversing with people . . . using the words faith, devil, I swear, damnable, cursed, etc."

Robert Treat Paine, whose sister Eunice lived in nearby Germantown, was often an addition to the company, an addition that Adams usually resented because Paine, like Lambert, showed little regard for John's thin skin. Yet he confessed that his friend, conceited and ill bred as he was, had "wit, sense, and learning, and a great deal of humor."

In such company there was much good conversation, ranging almost invariably from the nature of the universe and man, through the affairs of the Commonwealth to local politics and personalities. The time he gave to these discussions Adams did not begrudge. Informed conversation was part of education; it was a means of acquiring and of extending one's knowledge; it trained the mind and sharpened the wits.

But the town's other distractions continued to beset him sorely. "Guns, girls, cards, flutes, violins" drew him from his studies. "Laziness, languor, inattention, are my bane," he wrote. "I am too lazy to rise early and make a fire; and when my fire is made at ten o'clock, my passion for knowledge, fame, fortune or any good is too languid to make me apply with spirit to my books, and . . . my mind is liable to be called off from law by a girl, a pipe, a poem, a love-letter, a Spectator, a play. . . ." It was the girls who were a special and most dangerous distraction. One, in particular, posed a serious threat to his resolutions. Hannah Quincy, daughter of Josiah, lived at Germantown and John Adams found her company delightful. He rode over frequently to talk and flirt with her. Her beauty and quickness of wit charmed him and she, a conscious coquette, rallied him about his concentration on the law. What kind of a husband would such a serious young man make? "Suppose," she asked him, "you was in your study, engaged in the investigation of some point of law or philosophy, and your wife should interrupt you accidentally and break the thread of your thoughts . . . ?" How then would he react?

"No man, but a crooked Richard," John answered, "would blame his wife for such an accidental interruption. And no woman but a Xanthippe would insist upon her husband's company after he had given her his reasons for desiring to be alone."

"Should you like to spend your evenings at home in reading and conversing with your wife, rather than to spend them abroad in taverns or with other company?" Hannah persisted. John felt uncomfortable at the turn the conversation was taking. It was as though he were pressing a proposal and she evading it. That had not been his intention at all, but it was typical of Hannah to turn conversation into personal channels and he felt often as though he were engaged in a perilous game with the lovely girl, a game that at any moment might carry him much further than he wished to go. Her manner had about it a kind of gentle insinuation so that it was hard to talk to her on trivial subjects without feeling that one was becoming slowly and most pleasantly entangled in her soft web. It was an intoxicating sensation and John became familiar with the light-headedness that accompanied it. Yet at the same time he felt behind the wide eyes a spirit of calculation and sometimes mockery. Whether it was the Reverend Mr. Wibird with his prattle of love and courtship or one of her Quincy cousins, she handled them with a practiced deftness that made John uneasy. He waited a long moment before he replied. "I should prefer the company of an agreeable wife to any other company for the most part, not always. I should not care to be imprisoned at home."[4]

And so they fenced, playing out the problems of an imaginary matrimony in question and riposte, John dimly aware that such talk, delightful as it might be, could compromise a young man before he knew it, and yet he was unwilling or unable to extricate himself. Hannah, in addition to her wiles, had a good mind; she read and discussed brightly Pope's Homer, Milton, and the current plays and romances; he noted approvingly that "she is always thinking or reading." He often caught her in a kind of study, pensive and withdrawn, and at such moments she looked especially charming to him.

But such dalliance did nothing to promote a legal career and John noted in his diary: "Here are two nights and one day and a half spent in a softening, enervating, dissipating series of hustling, prattling, poetry, love, courtship, marriage. . . ." How much better, indeed how much safer, had the time been spent "in a painful research into the principles of law," on Grecian, Roman, Gallic, and British jurisprudence. He turned back again to Justinian, Coke, Gilbert, Grotius and Burlamaqui, to torts and trespass, to Hale and Bolingbroke.

He had by no means outgrown the acute self-consciousness which had so possessed him at Worcester. His thoughts were constantly preoccupied with the conditions of greatness, and, alternately, his determination to win the laurels of fame and his agonizing doubts of his own capacities, or, perhaps even more, of his resolution and strength of character. He went from one friend to another with his riddle, "How do we achieve fame?" To Bob Paine he suggested the importance of mastering Greek, and Paine laughed at him. He tried to talk to Sam Quincy about studying and the wise use of time, and Quincy laughed at him. He talked to Hannah and Esther Quincy about the folly of love; and about despising it and being "insensible of tender passions," and the two girls, in the wisdom of their blood, laughed at him. He talked to Parson Wibird about the decline of classical learning and endured that gentleman's witty retorts. And then he came home to lash himself for his affectation of learning and virtue "which I have not." Besides this, Adams noted that he had fallen into the habit of shrugging his shoulders and moving or distorting the muscles of his face "with the fancy that animation is a social grace." But he had merely made himself grotesque and ungraceful. He needed, indeed, the sneers and rebuffs that he fancied his behavior evoked. "Good treatment," he wrote, "makes me think I am admired, beloved . . . so I . . . grow weak, silly, vain, conceited, ostentatious." But a frown or sneer put him on guard and made him "more careful and considerate."[5]

He must create a reputation. But how? "How," he asked, "shall I spread an opinion of myself as a lawyer of distinguished genius, learning, and virtue?" Perhaps he should "make frequent visits in the neighborhood, and converse familiarly with men, women and children in their own style, on the common tittletattle of the town and the ordinary concerns of a family," and in doing so drop little intimations of his mastery of the law. Or perhaps he had best circulate around Boston, making contacts with merchants and men of weight, attending the Exchange, soliciting business. Best of all would be a famous case where he could "exert all the soul and all the body I own, to cut a flash, strike amazement, to catch the vulgar." Should he, in short, creep toward success or achieve it by "one bold determined leap into the midst of fame, cash and business?"[6]

Before greatness, he concluded, must come "a greatness of mind," an unshakable firmness and a resolution. Jurisprudence was not his only study. He leavened his law readings with Shakespeare who, in his insights into the "springs of action," offered a clue to "the labyrinth of mental nature." From his own observations of the world about him the playwright had conceived by analogy how the actors in his great dramas might behave. A lawyer could do as much by closely observing the life that eddied about him in a Massachusetts village. For forensic training, he repeated aloud Tully's orations against Catiline, savoring "the sweetness and grandeur of his sounds, and the harmony of his numbers . . . a noble exercise. It exercises my lungs, raises my spirits, opens my pores, quickens the circulations."[7]

Amidst such doubts and perplexities, endless introspections and the disturbing attractions of Hannah Quincy, Adams' spirits were not improved by the outcome of his first legal business. Caught in a typical small-town wrangle over a stray horse, and pressed for time, he drew a defective writ and, in consequence, saw the case nonsuited and his client defeated. The frustrated client cursed bitterly and wished the case in hell, while John gloomed for days over his failure. The scoffers would be sure to seize upon it as an example of his inexperience and ineptness. Bob Paine would make a story of it and Luke Lambert doubtless would entertain the town with a mock heroic account.

So the winter passed, with the reasonably faithful observance of his regimen, but John continued to lament his inability to concentrate long on any one subject: "Read one book one hour; then think an hour; then exercise an hour; then read another book an hour; then dine, smoke, walk, cut wood; read aloud another hour; then think, etc.; and thus spend the whole day in perpetual variations from reading, to thinking, exercise, company, etc." At last, in his studies, he hit upon a technique that helped hold his attention to the work at hand. He began to make notes in the margins of the book he was reading. Starting with a marginal index to each paragraph, he soon extended the index to a running debate carried on from page to page. Exclamations, queries, sharp rebuttals and emphatic agreements wound their way through the pages.

He varied his Braintree routine with visits to Boston to observe the sessions of the Court of Common Pleas, a trip to Worcester, and his attentions to Hannah Quincy. As for legal business, it was discouragingly slow—a few deeds to draw, a will or two, with fees insufficient to keep him in tobacco. Moreover, there was increasing friction between John and the legal amateurs of the county—deputy sheriffs, petit justices—in Adams' phrase, "pettifogging meddlers" who had monopolized small matters of law in the town, even presuming so far as to draw writs and argue cases. He clashed repeatedly with Captain Eben Thayer, Ben Tirrell and others who, untrained as attorneys, nonetheless did not hesitate to enter the lists in the justices' courts, depending on the justices' own legal simplicity and a smattering of legal phrases. That was well enough for a rural village perhaps, but if the law was to establish itself securely with the order and dignity of a true profession, unqualified practitioners must be barred. In Adams' case both principle and self-interest prompted him to try to clip the wings of the "pettifoggers" and amateurs. On his trips to Boston he took up the problem with his colleagues at the bar. He found that they shared his convictions. If the bar could agree on a course of action against such individuals and the courts be prevailed upon to accept it, a thoroughgoing reform might be made. At someone's suggestion a group began to meet and discuss various issues affecting the bar. Regulations were proposed "not only for confining the practice of law to those who were educated to it, and had sworn fidelity in it, but to introduce more regularity, urbanity, candor, and politeness, as well as honor, equity and humanity, among the regular professors." Then the group, constituting itself a kind of informal club and drawing together all the leading lights of the profession, passed on from business to social pleasures. Professional problems had first priority but the meetings were filled with wit and good humor, with law and with life, so that the young lawyer from Braintree found them a feast of mind and spirit, and later remembered them as "the most delightful entertainments I ever enjoyed." The "pettifoggers" were not, to be sure, swept at once from the field but pressures were applied which they must ultimately yield to.

The other notable event of the winter was John's narrow escape from matrimony. He continued to visit Hannah Quincy, not in the character of a suitor but rather of an interested friend, which did not at all please that practical young lady. She had marriage on her mind and, while she liked John and quite readily, in her gently mocking way, entered into his discourses on the beauties of Milton, or his explorations of divine purpose and the nature of the cosmos, she was primarily concerned with marriage. John's attentions, cautious as they were, discouraged other admirers, actual or potential, while he, maddeningly, perversely, drifted along as though lively conversations about art and beauty, truth and justice, were the true ends of existence. Yet of his infatuation there was little question. His heart had very nearly succumbed to Hannah, his sweet Orlinda, although his head held out.

At last one day when John was innocently enough exploring Shakespeare's concept of kingship or the excellencies of Pope's translation of Homer, he found that Hannah, with accustomed artfulness, had turned the conversation into personal channels once again; but this time, with spring as her ally, she reduced him to an avowal or at least to actions which she would be justified in understanding as a declaration of betrothal. Charmed and distracted, he felt himself drawn to the beautiful girl with a force that he was powerless to resist. Their aloneness in the room, from having been merely casual and fortuitous, was suddenly of profound meaning—the world hung in orbit on the instant—the attitudes of friends were, in a moment, transformed to those of lovers. John felt himself strong and masculine as a sword and Hannah, in anticipation, was all gentleness and sweet attraction. Here was a softer mistress than the law. A second more and he would have spoken, but then, like the denouement of a romantic novel, Jonathan Sewall and Esther Quincy burst in upon them. They drew apart, the spell broken, and John, alarmed at his close call, forswore for a time the company of the bewitching Hannah.[8]

Then from the wings appeared young Bela Lincoln, recruiting militia and splendid in a captain's uniform. He fell at once under Hannah's spell and, uninhibited by Adams' monkish regimen, proposed not long after and was promptly accepted. For the moment at least John was safe from the menace of matrimony, but not surprisingly, he learned of his successor's triumph with the bitterest feelings. Richard Cranch conveyed the bad news and John poured out to him the misery of the disprized lover. "If I look upon a law book," he wrote, "my eyes, 'tis true, are on the book, but my imagination is at a tea table with Orlinda seeing that face, those eyes, that shape, that familiar friendly look. . . .

When the family are at devotions I am paying my devotions across a tea table to Orlinda. I go to bed and ruminate half the night, then fall asleep and dream of the same enchanting scenes till morning comes and brings chagrin and fretfulness and rage in exchange for bliss and rest." If madness came from thinking exclusively of one thing, he should soon go mad, for he could think of nothing but Hannah, Hannah beautiful and infinitely desirable, smiling at him across the tea table. Now he could not even taste the tea. It was bitter as gall—"how," he exclaimed "shall I curse thy once delightful but now detested stream! May I never taste thy waters more, for they will always recall the remembrance of Orlinda's cruelty, my eager wishes, and fatal disappointment." Or if he must taste it, let it be as buckets from the stream of Lethe that he may forget his woe.

To his surprise he lived and retained his sanity, and even found a little chill comfort in recalling Jeremiah Gridley's warning against the married state.

V

While John Adams struggled to establish himself as a lawyer in Braintree and prepared himself to take a leading place at the bar, an event took place which was full of consequences for his future. In the latter months of 1760 a Salem customs official named James Cockle applied to the justices of the Superior Court at the Essex session for writs of assistance, writs provided for by parliamentary statute to uphold the provisions of the acts of trade and navigation, especially those acts referring to the payment of duties on imported goods and the apprehension of smugglers. The writs, if granted, would entitle the customs officer to break into ships, shops, homes or warehouses suspected of containing smuggled goods without a specific warrant. The desired writ was thus, in effect, a general search warrant and the mere mention of it was enough to arouse the profoundest apprehensions in the breast, not only of lawbreakers, but of every friend to the constitutional liberties of Englishmen. Arbitrary search was the instrument of tyranny, the weapon of tyrants. It must be resisted at its inception, for from it could come a chain of abuses, until no man could be secure in his property. The right of property to an Englishman, native or colonial, was the primary and essential right on which all others rested. Attacks on property in the form of illegal levies or taxes had been the characteristic aggression of autocratic rulers. Cockle's application was thus followed with the closest attention by many who had no interest in protecting smugglers from the proper operation of the laws. And by no group more attentively than the members of the Boston bar. The question was a tender one, and Chief Justice Stephen Sewall, "a zealous friend of liberty," expressing some doubts as to the constitutionality of the requested writs, ordered that the case be more fully argued at the Boston session of the court.

There were on the books a number of parliamentary statutes (some had been suspended and some never enforced at all) which imposed duties on articles of trade and limited the ports to which colonial merchants might sail and the goods which they might carry. In the common effort against the French, the enforcement of some of the acts had been neglected and the habit of evasion of inconvenient or unjust portions of the trade regulation had grown, receiving in many instances a kind of sanction by the connivance or inaction of royal officials. But with the issue of the French and Indian War clearly decided in favor of England and her colonies, the ministers of the Crown began to instruct colonial officials from governors down to customhouse clerks to enforce specific provisions affecting colonial commerce. To the British it seemed entirely proper and unexceptional to enforce existing legislation designed for the benefit of the Mother Country but suspended during a period of common crisis. To the colonists who had come to take laxness for law, it seemed, on the other hand, most unmotherly to insist on a strict performance of rules that had become more honored in the breach than the observance. Rumors of stricter enforcement had preceded the fact and aroused the apprehensions of a people extremely conscious of the nature of their relation to the mother country and most sensitive to their "rights." It was apparent that the application of Cockle was an indication of the intention of the Crown officers to be aggressive in their application of the laws regarding trade.

In the fall of 1760, Chief Justice Sewall died. The hot and urgent question was who should succeed him. The liberal wing of the bar—those lawyers who were, generally, in opposition to Governor Francis Bernard—supported the cause of James Otis' father, Colonel James Otis, Sr., an able and popular lawyer with many years of experience at the bar. The story had it that the two governors preceding Bernard had promised the office to the Colonel. The "court party" made up of those who had cast their fortunes with the Governor supported Thomas Hutchinson, a man whose ability few could dispute. To those outside the circle of power formed by Bernard and his adherents Hutchinson's liabilities were his close association with the Governor and the concentration of public offices represented in him and his immediate family. Hutchinson was already Lieutenant Governor, commander of Castle William, the fort in Boston Harbor, a member of the Governor's Council, and Judge of Probate. Nevertheless, plural office-holding was commonplace at the time and the Governor, with so important a case pending in the Superior Court, had little hesitation in appointing as Chief Justice a man known to be friendly to the claims of the Crown.

With Thomas Hutchinson as the newly appointed Chief Justice, the merchants of Boston had better cause for their anxieties. As Advocate General for the Province, it fell to James Otis to argue the Crown's case before the Justice who occupied the seat that Otis felt belonged by right to his own father. He therefore resigned his Crown office and became, with Oxenbridge Thacher, attorney for the merchants. The Governor was prepared for Otis' opposition; fiery, eloquent and learned as the man was, his reputation for eccentricity and his vulnerability to the charge that he was acting out of a desire for personal revenge might be counted upon to lessen his effectiveness. But with Thacher and Otis allied against the writs, the Crown officials must anticipate a grim battle. Thacher, genial and conciliatory in his manners and popular with all groups in the city, could not be charged with animus or self-interest. By simply associating himself with the opposition to the writs he gave the cause a respectability that Otis, with all his passion and violence, could not much diminish.

Attorney for the Crown was Jeremiah Gridley. The case was to be tried in the court chamber in the Town House, a handsome room from whose walls full-length portraits of Charles II and James II looked down. As the time for the sitting of the court approached John Adams became obsessed with the drama and excitement of the occasion. On one side was his kind sponsor and adviser, the great, benign, wise Jeremiah Gridley; on the other his hero, James Otis. In his own mind, he prepared imaginary briefs, argued the cause, framed rebuttals, and marshaled citations; when the doors of the Town House opened that fateful day he was in the forefront of those who pressed for places in the council chamber. He had with him paper and pen and a pot of ink. Convinced that the case would be a historic one, he was determined to record it so that he might study it at leisure. The room was jammed with "officers of the government," the Boston bar, interested merchants and dozens of others wedged into every available space. John saw Benjamin Prat "in a corner of the room . . . as a spectator and auditor, wit, sense, imagination, genius, pathos, reason, prudence, eloquence, and immense learning, hanging by the shoulders on two crutches, covered with a great cloth coat."

Before the judges in their white wigs and scarlet robes, Jeremiah Gridley opened the argument for the Crown. He was, as always, informed and learned; indeed, with the excitement and tension present in the court, wearisomely so. His case, in its essentials, was that the writs were needed "in assistance" to the proper enforcement of the law. The statutory basis for the writs was clear enough from enactments of the twelfth and fourteenth years of the reign of Charles II. The authority of the Supreme Court in the Province to grant such writs was contained in statutes of the seventh and eighth years of the reign of William III which granted to colonial customs officials those powers which they enjoyed in England. This, much embellished with rhetoric and logic, was the argument that John recorded, scratching away frantically for a time and then, distracted by the flow of discourse, forgetting to write a word for minutes on end.

Oxenbridge Thacher replied, addressing himself closely to the law and precedent in the case. It appeared to him that the Court was being asked improperly to exercise the authority of the Court of Exchequer in England, an authority which the Court had expressly renounced. This was the kind of brief that appealed to judges and lawyers—the patient recapitulation of earlier decisions, the definition of jurisdictions, the sober appeal to reason. The audience listened attentively, noting the points scored, balancing the arguments of the younger man against those of his mentor. John Adams felt a growing impatience. Moderate and restrained, informed and thorough as Thacher was, it appeared increasingly that the weight of precedent and authority was on the side of Gridley and the Crown. Yet it must not be. It could not be. If the law supported such an invasion of personal rights, the law must be defective. As he listened, it seemed to him that a frightening chasm opened at his feet. The fact was that the justices were trying more than a minor contention over the proper authority of the court; it came to Adams suddenly with the force of revelation what he had known before only in a dim, inarticulate way: simply stated, the parties before the court were England and America. What was being acted out here with colorful panoply, with dutiful observance of forms and traditions, of citations, cases, decisions, reports and precedents, was the opening act in a drama whose consequences, when he thought of them, chilled the blood in his veins. For the first time since the initial settlement of Englishmen established a precarious foothold on the continent of North America, "the views of the English government towards the colonies and the views of the colonies towards the English government" were "directly in opposition to each other," and by the imprudence of the British ministry had been "brought to a collision." There had been many disputes, wrangles, major or minor irritations and conflicts, but never before had an issue been so squarely joined. England, mighty in victory, proud of her power and inherently contemptuous of the colonies, "would never give up its pretensions." The Americans, on the other hand, devoutly attached to their liberties as Englishmen, "would never submit, at least without an entire devastation of the country and a general destruction of their lives." This understanding, so piercing and so ominous, might be obscured or suppressed in the years that lay ahead but it would never be far from the surface of his conscious mind; his thoughts and actions would be shaped in a large measure by the considerations to which it gave rise. A part, at least, of his life would be directed toward the concluding act of the drama which opened in the Boston Town House in February 1761.

It is a classic mistake of historians, in searching out the causes which lead to great human crises, to look for a clear and consistent line of growth from seed to sapling to oak. Here it can be shown to have begun, they say, and buttress their argument with references to the confirming documents. But the beginnings are more illusive and remote, for the heart often does not know itself. The spirit rises and falls like the tides. What was yesterday lucid as spring water is tomorrow clouded with doubt and uncertainty. So it was with John Adams and those who thought as he did. Looking back on the trial from the perspective of some sixty years, he saw that "then and there, the child Independence was born." But if, at the moment itself, he had the illumination, it often seemed transient or illusory, and he returned gratefully and wholeheartedly to the grand consolation of being an Englishman, a proud member of the most advanced and enlightened nation on earth.

By the time that James Otis rose to speak, the stage was perfectly set for him. The crowd that filled the council chamber had had its fill of orthodox disquisition. Those who were opposed to the writs were uneasy at the array of facts which Jeremiah Gridley had paraded before the justices; a case that involved cherished constitutional rights seemed in danger of guttering out in a confusing dispute over points of law. Otis, with his flair and fire, his magic power over men's minds and sensibilities, drew everyone's attention. His opening sentence brought the issue out of the labyrinth of legal terms and precedents into the clear light of common understanding. "This writ," he declared, "is against the fundamental principles of laws." Here it was at last: the argument from principle, from higher law, no longer a precise and careful marshaling of precedents, flamed forth. Adams felt a sense of release as from pressure; he scratched furiously as Otis traced the story of Englishmen's struggle against arbitrary government. "A man who is quiet and orderly," he reminded his audience, "is as secure in his house as a prince in his castle." Only for flagrant crimes or "cases of great public necessity" might that privilege be invaded, or through special warrants sworn to and issued on good and sufficient grounds for suspicion. If general warrants were approved by the court every petty customs official, from the highest to the lowest, might invade the home of any Bostonian he had the slightest reason to suspect. A man, a citizen, could no longer be safe from the calumny of a neighbor or the malice of an informer. Much had been said by the attorney for the Crown about precedents. Precedents aside, it was more important to follow the known principles of the law than any one precedent. And as for the acts of Parliament cited in support of the Crown's case, any act of Parliament in opposition to the constitution was void, without force or effect in law. An act against natural justice and equity was void. If Parliament were to pass a statute containing the very words of the petition to the court, approving thereby especially and specifically the disputed writs of assistance, that statute would be void because it was in opposition to the constitution, and the executive courts must declare it to be so.

Otis' listeners, according to their predilections, were thrilled or startled to hear such a daring statement of the case against the writs. Otis had placed what would, before many years, be called "colonial opposition" on the high ground of principle rather than on the uncertain footing of precedent. He had boldly enunciated the view that acts of Parliament which conflicted with the unwritten and highly nebulous British constitution or, even more broadly, with "natural equity"—a phrase that might not improperly be translated "fair play"—were of no effect, and must be so declared by the King's courts. It was extraordinary, astonishing and fateful. Adams was stirred in his deepest being, swept by the speaker's power from all mooring of skepticism or hesitation, transfixed by Otis' masterful use of classical quotation, of common law, of history, and of Scripture. It is only given a man to be once so moved, so transported as John Adams was. These are the experiences that touch and transform; these are the moments in which truth seems to have descended from heaven in the inspired word. An old man's hindsight must have its due, for it is indeed in such moments that men are remade and revolutions conceived. Born from the authentic word, they grow in the darkness of men's hearts and minds until they are ready to dispute with the powers of this world the issue of man's destiny on earth.

When Otis, after some three hours of eloquence, concluded his arguments his audience was emotionally exhausted. The Chief Justice, sensing that his fellow justices had been swayed by that eloquence, proposed that the cause be continued to the next term and that the interval be improved by writing to England for specific instructions. These instructions, when they arrived, directed the courts to grant writs of assistance whenever a revenue officer should apply for them. So, from a practical point of view, the protest of the merchants through Otis and Thacher was of no avail. But John Adams, and many others, had been deeply stirred. He noted in his diary that "every man . . . appeared to me to go away, as I did, ready to take arms against writs of assistance." The concluding clause was a significant one.[1]

VI

In May 1761 Braintree was swept by one of its recurrent attacks of influenza. These came, unpredictable and terrible as fate itself, to every community in colonial America. Alternating with smallpox and, on occasion, typhoid or diphtheria, they carried off the tender young and weakening old. Every age group had its special perils of disease and death: "throat distemper" or diphtheria was the most virulent of a dozen diseases commonly contracted in childhood; the older youth (especially girls), in their late teens or early twenties, were often brought down by consumption in long, distressing illnesses. "Intermitting fever," pneumonia and diarrhea lay in wait for the middle-aged, and, among the aged (those over fifty), their lowered resistance caused all diseases of young and old alike to become potentially dangerous. There were, in addition, a number of ordinary ailments, painful enough but seldom fatal—sick headaches, rheumatism, gout, the common cold, "delicate nerves," and a variety of unidentifiable complaints comprehended under the word "ailing."

The epidemic that hit Braintree put half the town to bed, among them John's parents. The attack was fatal to the senior Adams, then seventy years old, and to sixteen "aged people" in the town. He died after a short illness and was buried from the meeting-house where he had long been a deacon. Susanna Adams, almost twenty years younger than her husband, survived, although she was too ill to attend his funeral.

John had loved and admired his father, but the elder Adams had lived out his allotted years and gone, his son was sure, to his eternal reward. When untimely death was a commonplace, those taken in the ripeness of years asked for no mourning. John Adams, Sr., left a comfortable but modest estate—a farm in Randolph a few miles to the south of Braintree, the family farm at Braintree, and an adjacent farm and farmhouse. The property was divided, one third to their mother and the remaining two thirds to the sons. John, since he had received "a liberal education," inherited the smaller allotment, the farmhouse a few yards away from the deacon's house; his youngest brother, Elihu, received the Randolph holding, and Peter Boylston the Adams homestead.

The inheritance of the farm made an important change in John Adams' status in the community. He was now a propertied man, a freeholder and a taxpayer and as such entitled to participate fully in town meeting, a member where before he had been only a spectator. Until a man was a freeholder, he must inevitably be something of a cipher in his community. A freeholder was a man independent of any landlord, master of his own acres, servant of no one. The world was divided, roughly and practically enough, into those who held landed property and those who did not. The propertyless, wise, enterprising, talented, educated, honest and upright though they might be, counted, ultimately, for very little in the affairs of their community or of the wider world. To have weight meant to have property. As a member of his father's household, John Adams, in the eyes of the town, was simply a bright, rather brash and promising young man. As the head of a household, he must be taken into a more serious account. His vote in town meeting must be anticipated or solicited; he must share the offices at the town's disposal; he must be paid some heed when he arose to speak in town meeting. Clad in this splendid name of "freeholder," Adams was heir to the rights painstakingly accumulated by many earlier generations of yeoman farmers who had patiently and stubbornly maintained what they considered their proper due against rapacious kings, knights, barons or, later, the city bourgeoisie.

Most important of all, as a freeholder John Adams was a member of the town who might participate fully in its deliberations. As we have seen, he had attended the town's deliberations since childhood, but only as an observer. Now he could try his political wings—talk, politick and vote in his own right. The town, in turn, gave him little time to enjoy his new status. He was promptly elected surveyor of highways, an office, needless to say, without pay. His friend Dr. Savil had nominated him for the position, and answered his indignant protest by reminding him that the town required that everyone who was capable take a turn in some office. The doctor had nominated Adams as surveyor to prevent his being appointed to the far more onerous job of constable. To this John replied, "They might as well have chosen any boy in school, for I know nothing of the business." But since they had chosen him he would do the best he could. The principal need, it seemed, was for a new bridge to replace the decrepit one between Parson Wibird's and Dr. Millar's. He decided to build a bridge that would be a permanent reminder of his tenure as surveyor. Accordingly, as he recalled in later years, "I went to ploughing, and ditching, and blowing rocks upon Penn's Hill, and building an entire new bridge of stone." Unhappily for his fame, next spring's floods washed away the bridge. But it was rebuilt and the blame fell on the workmen, not on John who, everyone agreed, had executed his office with "impartiality, diligence and spirit."

Emboldened by his new status, Adams launched crusades against taverns (there were twelve in Braintree, two of them run by John's adversaries, Bracket and Thayer) and against the pettifoggers. The taverns he attacked as sores of the community. Here "the time, the money, the health, and the modesty, of most that are young and of many old, are wasted; here diseases, vicious habits, bastards, and legislators, are frequently begotten."[1]

If you stop at a tavern, Adams wrote, "you will find dirt enough, very miserable accommodation of provision and lodging for yourself and your horse. Yet if you set the evening, you will find the house full of people drinking drams, flip, toddy, carousing, swearing, but especially plotting with the landlord [Adams doubtless had Eben Thayer in mind] to get him, at the next town meeting, an election either for selectman or representative. Thus the multiplicity of these houses, by dividing the profits, renders the landlords careless of travelers, and allures the poor country people, who are tired with labor and hanker after company, to waste their time and money, contract habits of intemperance and idleness, and by degrees to lose the natural dignity and freedom of English minds, and confer those offices, which belong by nature and the spirit of all government to probity and honesty, on the meanest, and weakest, and worst of human characters. . . . Quarrels, boxing, duels, oaths, curses, affrays, and riots, are daily hatching from eggs and spawns" deposited in these nests.[2]

Against the pettifoggers his first notable triumph came in a dispute rising out of just such a tavern brawl. It was a typical small-town squabble that had better, in John's view, have been settled by fisticuffs than lawsuits. The case was tried in the justice's court before Major Crosby and Adams took the occasion to lecture the Major on the proper duties of judges, and the plaintiff and his pettifogger on the dignity of the law and its proper uses. He made a brave parade of his legal learning, perhaps not much when measured against a Prat or a Thacher, but enough to discomfort his opponents and impress the court. So he carried the case and set the town to talking of his performance. He had certainly been brash and presumptuous enough, but he had touched a note of genuine eloquence in his eulogy of the law and had shown a boldness and force that were well remarked. He shortly had occasion to rout Thayer twice more, but it was typical of him that in his triumph he stopped to remind himself that he had managed his cases less well than he might have. "I see several inadvertent mistakes and omissions," he noted, adding, "But I grow more expert, less diffident, etc. I feel my own strength. I see the complacent countenances of the crowd, and I see the respectful face of the justice, and the fearful faces of the pettifoggers. . . ." He would be more than a match for the "all myrmidons . . . bulldogs, hounds, creatures, tools," of Thayer.[3]

Flushed with his victories, he prepared a town ordinance to limit the licensing of the iniquitous taverns, and then, hearing that his enemy, Eben Thayer, intended to resign as deputy sheriff, he plotted to secure the office for his brother, Peter Boylston. Boylston was a cheerful, easygoing young man not especially well equipped to make his way in a hard world. To place him in Thayer's job would be a leg up to his brother and a notification to the county at large that he was not without influence in the local seats of power. The campaign, carefully planned and painstakingly executed, succeeded. Boylston Adams was commissioned and sworn and undertook his duties. John's estimate of his brother's rather limited capacities was indicated by his diary entry: "Now a new train of anxieties begins. . . . Fears of imperfect services, imperfect and false returns, voluntary and negligent escapes, miscalculations, want of strength, courage, celerity, want of art and contrivance, etc.; rashness, indolence, timidity, etc."[4] In November of 1761, having completed three years of practice in the Inferior Courts of the Province, John Adams and his friend Samuel Quincy, handsomely done up in black gowns with white bands, their wigs neatly fixed and powdered, were sworn before the Superior Court as barristers.

Despite this professional advance, John was far from satisfied with the progress of his career. He had been practicing law for three years and was still, it seemed, as far as ever from having established himself as a lawyer of consequence in the Province. The important cases and handsome fees were reserved to the Boston attorneys; John was merely a country advocate making a meager living by filing writs and arguing cases in justices' courts that usually involved some wretched wrangle between disputatious neighbors. He bent himself once more to his studies and for a time faithfully observed his rule to rise with the sun, reading Bolingbroke or Tillotson, or a portion of Horace, plodding through the *Institutes of the Canon Law*, Hale and Gilbert, and making a start with Pufendorf.

John's friend, Richard Cranch, journeyed often to Weymouth, a few miles south of Braintree, to press his courtship of the Reverend William Smith's eldest daughter, Mary, and John, combining legal business with the pleasure of a ride, sometimes accompanied him. There were two other girls in the Smith household, Abigail, and Elizabeth or Eliza as the family called her. They were bright and pretty girls, good talkers and, more important, good listeners. John found himself immediately at home in the family. Richard Cranch's engagement to Mary invested the setting with a mood most conducive to romantic thoughts and sentiments. Quick and witty themselves, the Smith girls stimulated John to his best efforts of satire and ridicule and his facile mimicry of local characters sent them into what were, to John, gales of intoxicating laughter. When Richard wrote a brief note to Mary from Germantown, John added a postscript: "Dear Ditto,—Here we are, Dick and Jack, as happy as the wickedness of the world will allow philosophers to be."

Charmed by such auditors and still bruised from his abortive romance with Hannah Quincy, John discovered that business took him more and more frequently to Weymouth and to the agreeable family circle of the Reverend Mr. Smith. Mary was betrothed to Richard. Of the two remaining sisters, John was drawn most strongly to Abigail. After the conscious wiles of Hannah, he felt reassured by her direct and unaffected manner. She had, moreover, a kind of pertness, a will to speak her mind that was the feminine counterpart of John's own outspokenness. Nine years junior, she showed no special deference to the rather cocksure opinions of the ruddy, ebullient young lawyer who was so ready to talk about everything, so bursting with ideas, ambitious plans, vagrant thoughts, speculations about the universe, criticisms of popular literature, observations about the nature of man and the proper form of society. He, delighting in conversation, found an equal appetite in her. That she stood up to him, not boldly or brazenly, but with a gentle strength of will that was a match for his impetuous force, made her especially attractive to him as a companion.

But the gay and robust spirit had a fragile home. From as early as she could remember, Abigail had been plagued with a succession of illnesses. Whatever was about, Abby caught and more severely than her playmates. While her sisters ran and played, she, cast in the role of a semi-invalid, read and dreamed, or sat beside her beloved grandmother, Mrs. John Quincy, listening to the old lady read or reminisce, spinning forth a wonderful colored fabric of country wisdom and humor. The Nortons and the Quincys were powers in the Commonwealth and the grandmother, in addition to a good dame's lore, brought the grace of a provincial lady to the rural town of Weymouth so that all she touched was transformed from the ordinary and the everyday into the special and unique. In that happy harmony of the very young and very old, sharing the precious gift of unhurried hours, Abigail Smith grew in mind and spirit to be a very unusual young lady. John Adams, growing in a very different way, a tormented, anguished, laborious way, had the sense to recognize her when he met her. Because they soon knew that they had been, in some inscrutable manner, destined for each other since the beginning of time, their courtship unfolded without haste or urgency, as a flower will. John was caught up in a busy demanding world. He had a career to make. Abigail was seventeen. Sickness had given her patience. When they could not be together, they wrote each other (adopting in a self-consciously literary spirit the pen names of Diana and Lysander) letters full of a grave and delicious play, of wit and of devotion. To John, she was soon "Miss Adorable" and, occasionally, "Miss Jemima"; to her he was first, most correctly, "Mr. John Adams," then "My friend" and "Jonathan."

Visiting Abigail, he brought her a letter ordering her to "give the bearer as many kisses and as many hours of your company after six o'clock as he shall please to demand and charge them to my account. I presume," he added, "I have a good right to draw upon you for the kisses, as I have given two or three millions at least, where one has been received, and of consequence the account between us is immensely in favour of yours, John Adams."[5]

Abigail replied that, since he had raised the subject, he in fact owed her a considerable sum for the purloined kisses. John's answer was that she could not go to the law to compel him to pay, "unless I refuse marriage; which I never did, and never will but on the contrary am ready to *have you* at any time."

But Abigail was as shy as her suitor was ardent. As a man John wished to press his courtship to its conclusion as rapidly as possible. While it was true that he had still not established himself in his profession, he was the owner of a prosperous farm and could marry with confidence that he could provide, albeit modestly, for his bride. As a woman, Abigail was content to be courted and to play out to the last delightful moment the little drama in which she had the leading role. Womanlike she understood that as the sought-for and desired one she had a power that she would never again enjoy. As a wife her authority, considerable though it might be, would be limited and contingent. Her lord and master would assume at least a formal ascendancy, and if she was not taken for granted she could not expect to keep him in a fever of anxiety and anticipation, of protestation and devout avowal.

Increasingly their meetings, starting in conversation, ended in lovemaking that threatened at times to sweep them both from the moorings of prudence and restraint. When a storm prevented him from hurrying to Weymouth, John wrote to Abby that it was a cruel but perhaps blessed storm, "cruel for detaining me from so much friendly and social company, and perhaps blessed to you, or me or both, for keeping me *at my distance*." He was drawn to her as steel to a magnet and "itches, aches, agues (and repentance) might be the consequences of a contact in present circumstances." He was setting out for the safer territory of "noisy, dirty" Boston "where parade, pomp, nonsense, frippery, folly . . . luxury, politics, and the soul-confounding wrangles of the law will give me the higher relish for spirit, taste and sense, at Weymouth, next Sunday." Then the salutation—"Yours (all the rest is inexpressible). . . ."[6]

When they were together they sat till midnight talking and making love; when apart, they often wrote to bridge the days until they should be together again. In August the sitting of the Superior Court for Suffolk County kept John in Boston for a week and, breaking away to join Abigail, he made it no farther than Braintree before nightfall overtook him. Lying in his familiar bed, he dreamed "of a lady, tripping it over the hills, on Weymouth shore, and spreading light and beauty and glory all around her." At first he had thought it Aurora "with her fair complexion, her crimson blushes and her million charms and graces," but he soon found "it was Diana, a lady infinitely dearer to me and more charming." If Diana appeared every morning instead of the sun, he would not lie abed like a sluggard but "be all awake and admiring by four, at latest."[7]

Admiring as he might be, there was in Adams enough of the reformer that he was tempted onto the dangerous ground of suggesting to his beloved improvements in her person. His critical sense was seldom dormant and Abigail occasionally felt its sharp edge. She said, a little wryly, that compliments were "a commodity . . . that you very seldom deal in." Sometimes restive in the long courtship, Abigail herself could not forbear to tease her lover. Had he heard that two apparitions had been seen about the Smith house, "one of which resembled John and one a comely female?" How, she wondered, had it ever entered into "the head of an apparition to assume a form like yours?"[8]

The principal interruption in John Adams' courtship was brought about by his decision to be inoculated for smallpox. The disease had been especially virulent in recent years and inoculation for those who had not been stricken was urged by the doctors. After a date in the fall of 1764 had been set for their marriage, Adams decided that for Abigail's protection he should undergo the course of treatments which, in effect, meant deliberately contracting the disease under circumstances that, if they did not insure a mild case, at least provided the most favorable environment in which to battle it. Leaving Abby in "tears and anxiety," he retired to Braintree, to begin his contest with the pox. For Adams, the philosopher, the weeks of treatment had compensations that they did not have for Adams, the lover. But the latter knew a consolation in the letters that Diana wrote almost daily and that he replied to as faithfully.

The preparation which preceded the inoculation by a week was devastating enough, one would think, to destroy the patient without the additional burden of the distemper itself. It began with "a vomit," followed by a severe cathartic. John and his brother, so dosed, smoked, were sick by turns, laughed at each other's misery, ate milk toast without salt, spice or butter, read and talked, while John found strength to write to "the dear partner of all my joys and sorrows, in whose affections and friendship I glory, more than in all other emoluments under heaven."[9]

Abigail's letters were full of admonitions—they had indeed a most uxorious tone: he must keep warm, take his medicine, follow the doctor's instructions to the dot and thus preserve "that health upon which depends the happiness of your A Smith."[10]

In reply, John proposed to send her "a nest of letters like a nest of baskets . . . a nest of a hundred would cost me nothing at all" but rather be his best diversion. He would contract to tell in detail of his new world of doctors and nurses, chamber pots and stools, pills, potions, and powders and then go on to a gallery of characters who inhabited his world—"lawyers, physicians . . . tradesmen, county colonels, ladies, girls, children, sailors, etc., etc., etc." Yet closely as he had observed human nature and the world, he had about concluded that there was "not much satisfaction in the study of mankind to a benevolent mind— It is a new moon, nineteen twentieths of it opaque and unenlightened." Familiarity with the common run of people served primarily to acquaint one with "vices and errors and follies enough to make you despise them."[11]

Abigail in her chamber, solitary as a nun, thought only about her Lysander. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh and why not the mind thinketh?" she asked. To know that she was constantly in her lover's thoughts, as he in hers, helped to "alleviate the pangs of absence . . . notwithstanding you tell me that you sometimes view the darker side of your Diana." That darker side, she trusts, proceeded "more from a wrong head than a bad heart," and she added, slyly, "e'er long may I be connected with a friend from whose example I may form a more faultless conduct, and whose benevolent mind will lead him to pardon what he cannot amend." She would indeed welcome a nest of letters and treasure them more than a nest of baskets though every one were woven of gold and silver strands. His whole prospectus of letters was approved, but she could not forbear to remind him that although he was "a critical observer, and your judgment of people generally pleases me," he was sometimes "too severe" and did not "make quite so many allowances as human nature requires." Perhaps it is because the law leads him "to a nearer inspection of mankind, and to see the corruptions of the heart which I believe you often find desperately wicked and deceitful."

But her thoughts turned, inevitably, from the abstract to the particular, from the hearts of men to their two lovers' hearts. Last fast day they had spent together in intoxicating intimacy. "And why might we not this?" Perhaps because a wise providence had intervened. They must get what comfort they could from the thought that "we might, if we had been together, have been led into temptation. . . ." Moreover, their parting had been an agony to her—"the last time I saw you the reflexion of what I had that forenoon endured has been ever since sufficient to deter me from wishing to see you again, till you can come and go as you formerly used to."

While she wrote, Abigail heard her mother on the stairs. Mrs. Smith was not an enthusiastic supporter of her daughter's romance. She entered Abigail's room with a mild admonishment at the lateness of the hour, then asked to whom she was writing at midnight. When Abigail hesitated in her reply, her mother said with a smile, "Send my love to Mr. Adams; tell him he has my wishes for his safety." With the fire dwindled to ashes on the hearth, Abigail concluded with the promise to send John some books and a packet of tobacco.[12]

By Saturday John and his brother were established in a Boston "hospital" with eight others, among them Deacon Palmer's family from Germantown. Dr. Nathaniel Perkins appeared and made the inoculation. Taking up his lancet, he "divided the skin for about a quarter of an inch and just suffering the blood to appear, buried [an infected] thread about a quarter of an inch long in the channel—a little lint was then laid over the scratch and a piece of rag pressed on, and then a bandage bound over all."[13] Those inoculated then awaited the pains under the arms and in the knees and back which announced the onset of the distemper.

At Abigail's behest one of her Boston friends, Mary Nicolson, a young lady with the classical pseudonym of Arpasia, who had already conquered the pox, came to visit John, and he, dutifully, wrote a description of her to Abby. He noted especially "an eye that indicates not only vivacity but fire." She had not Diana's gracious femininity, but she was "a buxom lass," and he "longed for a game of romps with her and should have infallibly taken one," were it not for the fact that his hospital garb and the medicine he had dosed on would certainly have repelled her. But he added, "Polly Palmer [the deacon's daughter] and I shall unquestionably go to romping very soon." The doctors, he suggested, would allow nothing but "the card table, chequer board, flute, violin, and singing, unless titter tattle, roll and tumble" with the female patients.

Abigail professed to be unconvinced by John's assurance that writing to her was his principal form of amusement. Writing to a lady would be better placed under the heading of "dangerous and hard labor." For herself, she was content that he amuse himself as best he could, whether by writing or romping with the girls.[14] She could, at the same time, but wonder why she wrote him with "so little restraint, for as a critic I fear you more than any other person on earth"; in fact it was only as a critic she feared him. Then, having expressed indifference over his threat to romp, she could not forbear to reproach him for his cruelty in bestowing "those favors upon others which I should rejoice to receive, yet must be deprived of." "This is a right girlish letter," she added, ". . . but what is bred in the bone will never be out of the flesh."[15]

Full of hasty pudding and milk and calomel and mercury, John answered her letter with a warning. It was in more than the role of critic that she had reason to fear him as she would soon learn were he a free man. And since she had been bold enough to allude to his critical spirit, he might very well enumerate some of her more conspicuous shortcomings.

In reply, Abigail challenged him to describe her failings, "both of omission and commission, and all the evil you either know or think of me," and lamented her dreams in which "I see you but cannot make myself visible to you—that tortures me, but it is still worse when I do not come for I am then haunted by a half a dozen ugly spirits—one will catch me and leap into the sea, another will carry me up a precipice (like that which Edgar describes to Lear), then toss me down, and were I not then as light as gossamer I should shiver into atoms—another will be pouring down my throat stuff worse than the witches' broth in Macbeth." She had rather have the smallpox by inoculation ten times over than endure such a separation from him. As for his intimation that she dare not trust herself with him in another role besides that of critic, Abigail reacted with characteristic sauciness. "But heigh day, Mr. what's your name?" she wrote. "Who taught you to threaten so vehemently . . . ?" In such another role he might as well fear her as she him.

And then, for an ending: "Here is love, respects, regards, good wishes —a whole wagon load of them. . . . Tomorrow makes the fourteenth day—how many more are to come? I dare not trust myself with the thought. . . . Gold and silver have I none, but such as I have I give unto thee."[16]

Meanwhile the pox ran its course. John had a mild case with few eruptions and no aches. The only ill effect was the loosening of the teeth in his mouth, caused apparently by the diet and medication, until he felt that he could pull them with his fingers. And had been considerably weakened by "two heavy vomits, one heavy cathartic, four and twenty mercurial and antimony pills, and three weeks' close confinement. . . ."[17]

Abigail was delighted to hear that he had passed so easily through the fire of the disease—and had, as she put it, "stood the distemper like an oak." But she could not resist adding, playfully, that she was a little disappointed too, because she had expected "this purgation of Lysander would have set us on a level and rendered him a sociable creature, but ill luck, he stands if like an oak, and is as haughty as ever." The mention of one of his faults, haughtiness, made her think of others: "an intolerable, forbidding, expecting silence which lays such a restraint upon but moderate modesty that 'tis impossible for a stranger to be tranquil in your presence. What say you to that charge?" There was, indeed, little Lysander could say. Diana had ticked him off too skillfully. In his stiff New England manner, devoid of any easy grace or casual talk, he seemed almost to menace the person on whom he fixed his cold blue stare, daring him to speak of light and trivial matters, chilling him with his impenetrable reserve. Abigail knew the fire that lay beneath, the intensity masked by an air of austerity and withdrawal. But even she could not escape the feeling. Thus, she confessed, she wrote to him with far more freedom than she could bring herself to speak to him. From the charge of conceit he was readily exonerated, "but," she added, "for sauciness no mortal can match him, no, not even his Diana."[18]

By the first week in May, John was well along in his convalescence, taking short walks and longer rides, dining with his cousin Samuel Adams, drinking mountain malaga and eating oysters. As his strength increased so did his rashness and, perhaps a little nettled by Abigail's character anaylsis, he undertook the perilous task of criticizing his future wife. She had accused him of being saucy, saucy then he would be. He would prepare a catalogue of her "faults, imperfections, defects—or whatever you please to call them." At leisure he sat down to make his list. In the first place, she was "extremely negligent in attending so little to cards"—and when she took a hand she "held it but awkwardly and played it with a very uncourtly and indifferent air."

Another shortcoming, undoubtedly "the effect of a country life and education," was "a certain modesty, sensibility, bashfulness." A third defect was that Abigail "could never be prevailed to learn to sing. This I take very soberly to be an imperfection of the most moment of any."

"In the fourth place," he wrote, growing in boldness as he went, "you very often hang your head like a bulrush." Thus the company lost her "sweet smiles" and the "bright sparkle" of her eyes. This fault was "the effect and consequence of another, still more inexcusable in a lady, I mean the habit of reading, writing and thinking."

Another fault in which she had willfully persisted was sitting with her legs crossed. This ruins the figure by broadening the hips, injures the health, and "springs, I fear, from the former source, viz., too much thinking. These things ought not to be!"

The sixth imperfection is walking with her toes turned inward—"parrot-toed," the reverse of the "stately strut and the sublime deportment."

Here is the faithful record he wrote, "of all the spots I have hitherto discerned in this luminary. . . . Near three weeks have I conned and studied for more, but more are not to be discovered; all the rest is bright and luminious."[19]

Abigail thanked him for his catalogue but confessed, hardly to John's surprise, that she "was so hardened as to read over most of my faults with as much pleasure as another person would have read their perfections," and to persevere in most of them. He shall not complain a second time of her failure to sing, though her voice is "harsh as the screech of a peacock." As for crossing her legs, it was her view that although "a gentleman has no business to concern himself about the legs of a lady," she will reform so that "you may not for the future trouble yourself so much about it." Finally, only a dancing master could cure her "parrot-toes."

The inoculation ordeal was at last over and John on his way home to Braintree with his brother, yet he hesitated to continue on to Weymouth. Prudence eventually triumphed over inclination. To visit Abigail would be to run the risk, however slight, of infecting her with the smallpox. He must practice restraint for another week; but Abigail was unreconciled to their continued separation. She begged to be allowed to come to Braintree, if he would not come to Weymouth, and at least "peek through a window" at him.

Finally the tedious separation was over. A long lovers' summer stretched before them. Their determined sublimation of the physical urgency of their relationship heightened the intensity of all their meetings. They found in their delicious and perilous intimacy new harmonies and joys. In the game of love, courtship has special delights lost to those modern lovers who rush into matrimony with hardly an instant's delay. It is certainly futile to try and recapture in words the quality of that wonderful and exclusive world in which John Adams and Abigail Smith lived through the summer and early fall of 1764. Middle-aged readers have, alas, forgotten their own golden age, forgotten "that there could have been a time when [they] were young bodies flaming with the impetus of life," and lovers hardly need be reminded of it. They spent hours together more precious than silver and gold and pearls and precious stones; they parted, dazed and dazzled by love, and came together again, as John said, like magnet and steel.

The resistance of Abigail's mother was gradually worn away. Mothers are generally ambitious for their daughters. Mrs. Smith was a Quincy with a corresponding pride of family. She looked higher for Abigail than a struggling country lawyer; she hoped for possibly a Quincy cousin or a Cushing, an Appleton or Hallowell, Brattle or Sewall. The intense, awkward young man with his lack of grace and polish, his stiff, almost rustic manners, his rude outbursts and moody silences did not appeal to her as a good match for her fragile but gifted daughter. Certainly the Adamses were good people, solid as the granite outcroppings of Penn's Hill, but no one would suggest that they were either wealthy or fashionable. However, Mrs. Smith, Quincy or no, could not stand against the quiet, unshakable determination of her daughter. She gave way at last with good grace.

With his marriage set for the fall, Adams, always a farmer at heart, had an added incentive to improve his acres. He had his swamp cleared and ditched, a stone fence built, and thought constantly of ways to increase the productivity of the farm. Clients coming to get him to fill a writ were apt to find him plowing in the orchard, pruning apple trees, mending fences or carting manure, out in the pasture prying stones loose from the resistant earth, or clearing and burning underbrush, digging stumps and roots, or again cutting ditches in the swamp. He busied himself "planting corn, potatoes, etc., and digging up the meadow and sowing onions, planting cabbages, etc., etc."[20]

As the date set for the marriage approached John and Abigail were increasingly preoccupied with the details of setting up their home. They looked for a girl to help Abigail with the household chores. "Girls enough from fourteen to four and twenty are mentioned to me," he wrote Abigail, "but the characters of every mother's daughter of them is as yet problematical to me." He must leave the choice to her.

Furthermore, there still remained various furnishings to buy. John sent a cart to Boston to carry home Abigail's purchases, while he himself went to attend the session of the Inferior Court at Plymouth, departing reluctantly with "a disordered stomach, a pale face, an aching head and an anxious heart." There he was to find for his comfort "a number of bawling lawyers, drunken squires, and impertinent and stingy clients." He was minded to keep a register at Plymouth "of all the stories, squibbs, gibes and compliments," of the "wit, humour, smut, filth, delicacy, modesty and decency."

For her part, Abigail was off visiting in Newtown and Mystic, shopping in Boston, engaged in a round of prenuptial activities from which John was excluded. He wrote wistfully that he thanked heaven "another fortnight will restore you to me. . . . My soul and body have both been thrown into disorder by your absence, and a month or two more would make me the most insufferable cynic in the world—I see nothing but faults, follies, frailties and defects in anybody lately. People have lost all their good properties or I my justice, or discernment. But you who have always softened and warmed my heart shall restore my benevolence as well as my health and tranquillity of mind. You shall polish and refine my sentiments of life and manners, banish all the unsocial and ill-natured particles in my composition, and form me to that happy temper that can reconcile a quick discernment with a perfect candor."

Both victims of neurasthenia, they suffered physical as well as emotional anguish as the wedding day approached. Abigail, in Boston, was ordered to bed by her doctor and there lay "extremely weak and . . .

low spirited . . . hardly myself,"[21] while her groom-to-be nursed his own ills in Braintree.

But love, as in all proper romances, overcame the weaknesses of the flesh, and John and Abigail, both a little wan and shaken, were married on October 25, 1764, by the bride's father in the Weymouth meetinghouse. They endured all the rustic humor that such occasions provoke with as good grace as possible and then rode gratefully off to Braintree to start their life as husband and wife.

Simply considering the health of the bride and groom, it was not a promising match. Abigail was almost a chronic invalid, racked by migraine headaches, unaccountable fevers and persistent insomnia. John, a food faddist and seldom free of some nagging complaint, had already resigned himself to an early death. In an age when medicine was little more than a collection of country remedies, ancient superstitions, and a few recent, barbarous "scientific" innovations, an actuary would have given the couple little chance of surviving to enjoy many years of marital bliss.

It would be as presumptuous to try to evoke the sensations of Abigail and John Adams, bride and groom, as to convey successfully the almost uncommunicable emotions that were an aureole around their courtship. It was a snug feeling to be a married man (or woman) in one's own house. The early months of marriage are dominated by a feeling of "playing house." The magic game of childhood acquires a transcendence and a fulfillment. It seems scarcely possible that life should be so transformed. The condition of non-marriage appears absurd, and intolerable; the husband has a smile of pity for such unfortunates. The world, that only recently had an enormous capacity to bruise or wound, seems suddenly powerless to hurt him. Mankind, previously so full of malice and envy, becomes benign and honest. John Adams felt all these things. What Abigail felt, the author, being a man, is less confident to say; presumably she shared many of John's feelings and experienced some which were uniquely her own, to wit, a peacefulness, a sense of being "at peace," a sense of contentment, like a bird in a nest. They had discovered each other in the years of courtship and so they came finally together with only the deepening assurance and intimacy that physical love brought with it, passing from the intense drama of courtship to the profound joys of their new life.

If a modern psychologist could have examined unmarried John Adams, he would have found him full of corrosive anxieties, hostilities and aggressions, slightly paranoid in his suspicion that the hand of man was turned against him, obsessed by an often agonizing inferiority complex which led him to "overcompensate" by defiant, contentious actions, and almost schizophrenic in his dividedness between, on the one hand, the image of a contented rural lawyer and, on the other, the vision of a renowned if restless and harassed philosopher-author-attorney whose brilliance and eloquence were a byword through the land. There were signs, moreover, of the classic manic-depressive, swinging from the heights to the depths, from exultation to black despair. In addition, our psychologist would note "a pattern of aggressive behavior," a truculence not uncommon in small "mesomorphs"—men of compact body structure and high energy—but tending under stress to irrational and anti-social acts. Such is modern wisdom. Undoubtedly, there was a self-destructive element in Adams' make-up. He carried with him a handful of vigorous complexes, from hypochondria to mild paranoia, and lived balanced among them in delicate equilibrium.

Abigail insured his sanity. While many of the character traits mentioned above can be identified throughout his life, she gave him, with her love, a gyroscope that brought him safely through the stormiest seas. If she grew through him to be more touchy, more vulnerable to the barbs of the world, the outrageous actions of men, and the accidents of fortune, she made him less so. A wife cannot be utterly the converse of her husband and thus irreconcilable, nor the mirror image and thereby no more than an accentuation of his vices, since these may be more readily compounded than his virtues. At the happiest, she is able, as Abigail was, to enter with so much sympathy and understanding into her husband's world that she makes him more holy, more wholesome, more healthy. And this is what Abigail Adams did for the man who was her husband, her lover and her friend.

VII

At the conclusion of the conflict with France, England gave attention to how the war was to be paid for. Native Britons were already heavily taxed and it was not surprising that the thoughts of a ministry pinched for revenue turned to the American colonies. They, it could be argued, had been the principal beneficiaries of the long and costly struggle. They were growing and prosperous, and, to the English way of thinking, lightly taxed. As loyal members of the Empire they could have no honest objection to paying their fair proportion of the expenses of ousting the French. Or if they did, it made no difference, they should pay anyway. The Crown maintained a number of royal officials from customs collectors and tide waiters to naval officers, and got, in terms of revenue, a poor return on its investment. So it was that the penny-wise ministry of Lord Bute set about to extract from the colonies a return proportionate to the benefits they enjoyed as members of the wealthiest, most extensive, and, as the colonists themselves readily admitted, best-governed Empire in the world, indeed in all of history, ancient or modern. When the debate on the budget of 1764 opened in the House of Commons, George Grenville, of whom Pitt said acidly that the saving of a penny's worth of candle was more to him than the preservation of the Empire, brought forward the American Revenue Act (to be known in America as the Sugar Act). Mild as it seemed to English eyes, it was nonetheless momentous. Approved by Parliament with little debate, it became the first law ever passed by that body for the specific purpose of raising money in the colonies for the royal exchequer. It put teeth in the earlier Molasses Act of 1733, which had placed the high duty of sixpence a gallon on all foreign molasses imported into the colonies, and which had been so generally evaded by the Americans and ignored by the British as to have become a dead letter.

The new statute lowered the duty on foreign molasses to threepence but provided for the strict collection of that tariff. The existing duty on raw sugar was continued, and an increased duty imposed on foreign refined sugar. There were also new or higher duties on textiles, coffee, indigo and on madeira and canary wines imported directly from those islands. A number of colonial products, among them iron, hides, potash and pearl ash, were added to the so-called "enumerated list"—those articles which could be shipped only to the Mother Country. Rum, the most popular colonial drink, could not be imported from any but those West Indian islands in the possession of Great Britain.

Massachusetts, hearing of the proposed taxation, had already expressed its alarm through its agent, Jasper Mauduit. The new laws were accompanied by a vastly more efficient system for collection and the establishment of a vice-admiralty court at Halifax with provisions that, at least in the view of the colonists, placed them under most severe and unjust restraints before the courts. Boston's reaction to the Sugar Act was prompt and explicit. Given respectability by a large group of indignant merchants, guided by James Otis and Sam Adams, the opposition expressed itself in a noisy town meeting where Otis presented his *Statement of the Rights of the Colonies.* His arguments were an extension and development of earlier arguments in the writs-of-assistance controversy, with the additional point that taxation without representation was unconstitutional and therefore that such taxes were without effect and void and should be so declared by the King's courts. The meeting thereupon adopted resolutions deploring the Sugar Act as arbitrary and repressive and petitioned the General Court to represent to Parliament and to the Crown the opposition of the Province. A committee was appointed to correspond with patriots in other colonies—a forerunner of the famous committees of correspondence—and plans were laid for a campaign to bring economic pressure to bear on the Mother Country by refusing to import certain articles of British manufacture.

Meantime word reached the colony that Parliament planned to impose a stamp tax on the colonies at the next session unless the colonies themselves proposed an acceptable method of self-taxation to raise the required revenue. Governor Bernard, who had prorogued the General Court from month to month, hoping the agitation against the Sugar Act would die down and reluctant to provide a forum which Otis and his adherents would certainly use to extend the area and the degree of opposition, wrote to his friend, Richard Jackson, secretary to Lord Grenville, that delegates to the lower house had requested him to call the General Court into session so that it might draw up measures for self-taxation which would satisfy the British ministry and obviate the need of a parliamentary stamp tax. "It could never be doubted," Bernard wrote, "but that if the Parliament should require certain sums of the provinces, it is of no little consequence to them that such sums should be raised by provincial acts." The fact is, the Governor added, that the relation of the colonies "to the sovereign power has never been formally settled nor is generally understood." It was thus doubly important "that they may at least have the liberty of enacting internal taxation themselves: which I have no doubt but that they will readily do, when it shall positively be required of them."

When the General Court was at last convened in October the delegates affirmed their opposition to the Sugar Act and asked that the Stamp Act be delayed until an acceptable substitute could be found. In a letter of instructions to the agent of the colony, the General Court posed the central question for Mauduit to press upon the ministry: "If all the colonies are to be taxed at pleasure, without representation in Parliament, what will there be to distinguish them, in point of liberty, from the subjects of the most absolute prince? . . . A people may be free and tolerably happy without a particular branch of trade; but without the privilege of assessing their own taxes, they can be neither." As the Sugar Act was the first parliamentary act passed expressly to raise revenue, the Stamp Act marked the first time that Parliament had imposed a direct tax upon its American possessions.

Protest and petition served no purpose. There was in fact little indication that the ministers of the Crown had given any serious thought to the combined and most emphatic declarations of the colonies, or that Grenville's solicitation of alternatives to the Stamp Act was even made in good faith. Although Colonel Barré spoke with great eloquence against the act, Parliament with the moral obtuseness which often accompanies unlimited and undefined power over others, passed the bill by some 250 to 50. By March 8, 1765, the Stamp Act had gone through both houses of Parliament. To go into effect in November, the act was expected to raise an annual revenue of some sixty thousand pounds, which, with the return from the duties of 1764, would make a sum equal to a third of the cost of supporting the colonial military forces. The act required that newspapers, almanacs, pamphlets and legal documents of all types, ship's papers, licenses, dice and playing cards carry the stamp. It provided for a number of stamp tax distributors to be appointed from among the colonists themselves—a sugar coating for the pill.

The colonial reaction to the stamp tax was the most remarkable phenomenon of the lengthy pre-Revolutionary struggle. When word of the passage of the act reached America, the great mass of Americans showed an astonishing and disconcerting determination to resist its enforcement. Nor were the English ministers the only ones caught by surprise. A number of colonial patriots, among them Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania and Arthur Lee of Virginia, although they had opposed the passage of the act, had applied for positions as collectors when it became apparent that opposition was hopeless, and these gentlemen fell over themselves beating a most hasty retreat. The storm burst with greatest fury in the Bay Colony. It was not too much to say that a force quite unpredictable and beyond calculation—the force of a sensitive and instantly aroused public opinion, not confined to any group or class, not the product of manipulation or propaganda, but common to the majority of those Americans not closely attached by interest to the Crown—swept through the colonies from South Carolina north to Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Tax collectors were tarred and feathered or harried into resigning. The stamps themselves, when they arrived, were seized and burned. Again Otis was in the forefront of the Boston agitation, organizing meetings, framing petitions, superintending the activities of the committee of correspondence. Barré in his speech opposing the tax had referred to the colonists as "sons of liberty." Otis and Sam Adams took this name for the organization, which they recruited from the more determined patriots of Boston during the summer of 1765. Here was an instrument that, properly managed, could do things from which the moderates would shrink. Here were the makings of a managed mob, a group which could be turned loose at the will of its leaders to reinforce abstract arguments with direct and often violent action. Early in June, prodded by Otis, the Massachusetts Assembly issued a call to its sister colonies for a Congress which should meet in the fall to take common measures against the tax. Events in Boston moved to an alarming climax. August 12, the birthday of the Prince of Wales, was a holiday. It provided the occasion to ignite the combustible materials of emotion and resentment stirred by the stamp tax. Crowds collected in the streets and raised the cry of "Pitt and Liberty!" and "No taxation without representation!" Indignation at remote ministers and a distant Parliament found an inevitable focus in the person of the Boston stamp distributor, Andrew Oliver, brother-in-law to Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson. An enthusiastic patriot proposed to hang him in effigy and the suggestion was greeted with shouts of approval. However, the crowd seemed more disposed to noise than action and the day passed off with demonstrations and harangues.

Early in the morning of the fourteenth, word spread through the town that an effigy of Oliver and a giant boot with a head and horns upon it to represent Lord Bute were hanging from the Liberty Tree on the Common. People, excited by the news, hurried from every part of town until several thousand were collected around the elm with its grotesque ornaments. At dusk, the Sons of Liberty cut down the effigies and carried them in a procession through the streets to the Town House where an uneasy Governor and his advisers were assembled. There the crowd gave voice once more: "Liberty, Property and no Stamps!" Then, having bearded the authorities in their own council chamber, the mob moved on to Kilby Street where a building, rumored to be the office from which Oliver intended to distribute the stamps, was under construction. The mob swarmed over the half-finished structure like angry ants, tore it to the ground, and then, thoroughly inflamed, went to Oliver's residence on Fort Hill, and there built a giant bonfire in front of the house and burned the effigies. By this time many were drunk. In the light of the fire, they attacked the house itself, broke the windows, beat down the doors, destroyed furniture and left the place a shambles.

Adams was absent the day of the riot. When word reached him at Falmouth, he had mixed feelings. Was there any evidence, he asked himself, that Oliver had actually done anything to incur the wrath of the people of Boston, that he had aided or encouraged the passage of the stamp tax, or spoken ill of "the character of the people, their manners, their laws, their principles in religion or government," that, indeed, he had even applied for the position of stamp distributor? "If there is no proof at all of any such injury done to the people by that gentleman, has not the blind, undistinguishing rage of the rabble done him irreparable injustice?"

But the case did not rest there. Oliver was a member of the Hutchinson clan which monopolized half the lucrative offices in the Province. Was this not enough to excite jealousy and suspicion among the people? Was there, in Adams' mind, an abundance of evidence to indicate that Hutchinson was behind the hated tax, that he and his fellow Crown officials had, at the very least, tried to prevent anything being done in Boston "to discourage [Grenville] from his rash, mad, and dogmatical proceedings" in framing and pushing the tax through Parliament? He left his own question unanswered. Was Oliver to suffer because his brother-in-law might be inimical to what the patriots considered as their rights; because the Lieutenant Governor was suspected of being unsympathetic to colonial claims? John Adams had too keen a sense of justice to answer in the affirmative and his own emotions were too deeply involved to permit him to give an unequivocal negative.

The trouble was not over. Pious, law-abiding Boston had been possessed by the reckless spirit of the mob. An ugly mood of violence was abroad in the city, a mood that, once aroused, could not be easily laid to rest. On the twenty-fifth of August it flared forth again. This time Hutchinson himself was the target. There had been rumors for several days that some general action was planned and on the evening of the twenty-fifth the mob was swelled by recruits from adjacent towns. Starting at the Town House, the crowd marched on the house of the registrar of the admiralty and burned his public and private papers; they then plundered the house of the comptroller of customs with special attention to his wine cellar, and from there they moved on to Hutchinson's handsome home in Garden-court Street. Hutchinson and his family had fled but the mob gutted his house in a savage attack, destroying pictures and books, silver, china, clothing and even the interior walls.

This was too much for the most enthusiastic patriot. Or at least it was too much for the respectable citizens of Boston. Next morning, at Faneuil Hall, a large gathering of the inhabitants of the city passed resolutions roundly condemning the riot, calling on the selectmen to prevent further outbreaks and pledging the support of those assembled to preserve peace and order in the community. A cynic might have noted that the town had taken no measures to apprehend or punish those who had been involved in the earlier attack on Oliver's house, that no steps had been taken to prevent the rumored assault on Hutchinson, and that nothing effective would be done to discipline the rioters who had demolished the Lieutenant Governor's property the past night. Samuel Adams' public deploring of the affair must have sounded hollowly in Hutchinson's ears.

Early in 1765, at the January meeting of the Superior Court in Boston, John had gotten a message from Jeremiah Gridley enjoining him to come, in the strictest secrecy, to his office. His interest and curiosity thoroughly aroused, John hurried to the meeting. Gridley had decided to start a law club, an association of congenial spirits to study law and oratory. He had chosen John Adams, Sam Fitch and Joseph Dudley to form the group. The junta should tackle together, for a starter, the *Feudal Law* and Cicero's *Orations*. For John it was almost too good to be true. Gridley's patronage would be invaluable to him in his struggle to gain a footing in the "first business" of the bar, to enable him to move from the limited sphere of the county courts to important and remunerative cases in Boston city. Beyond that his besetting vice in all his studies was lack of plan and regularity. With the guidance of the greatest student of law in the Commonwealth and the stimulus afforded in Dudley and Fitch, Adams might, at last, make more satisfying progress in his studies.

The little group met the next night to plot its course. They would meet on Thursday nights and do their best to hold the discussion to the assigned topics. Armed with a compendious dictionary, they plunged at once into Stryki's *Examen Juris Feudalis*. Here was the feast of knowledge and reason Adams had longed for ever since he had started the practice of law. He noted in his diary: "I expect the greatest pleasure from this sodality that I ever had in my life. . . ." The club met in rotation at the members' houses and since Braintree was too far away, when it came Adams' turn, he entertained the sodality at Blodget's tavern, where the members, warmed with good food and much madeira, "were never in better spirits or more social." At Gridley's suggestion, they resolved to mark all passages which had been adopted into English common law from feudal antecedents. Then, when they came to read Lord Coke, they might trace the development of the law with sureness. The feudal system, they agreed, was well adapted to its time. The danger of it came when obsolete portions were accepted and enforced by modern nations under conditions very different from those under which it was formed. Its vestiges in the present day were almost invariably harsh and repressive.

Law alone was not allowed to usurp all the club's time. Oratory was of equal importance, Gridley reminded them. There were three sorts of orations—the demonstrative, deliberative, and judicial—and several parts—the peroration, the body, the exordium, and so on—and, beyond that, the cultivation of a literary style to be developed by "reading carefully the best English writers." In addition, he told his recruits, the members of the club should plan to publish articles in the newspapers. By such means, he declared, "I hope and expect to see at the bar . . . a purity, an elegance, and a spirit surpassing anything that ever appeared in America."

The other great event of 1765 was the birth of a daughter on July 14 to John and Abigail. They named the rosy, pretty infant after her mother and she was a frequent distraction to her father's political and legal preoccupations.

At the height of the Stamp Act excitement, Adams secured the publication of his "A Dissertation on Canon and Feudal Law," which he had started for the sodality, in the pages of the Boston *Gazette*. The essay was far from the objective, scholarly treatise that its title suggested. It was, in effect, a tract for the times which undertook to trace the rise of freedom in human society and suggest how that freedom might be preserved and extended.

At the heart of the problem of freedom lay man's use of power. The princes and nobles of the earth have by every means of fraud and violence tried to exercise unlimited power, while the common people have, in their turn, sought to confine "the power of the great within the limits of equity and reason," and thus secure their rights. "I say RIGHTS," Adams added, "for such they have, undoubtedly, antecedent to all earthly government—*Rights* that cannot be repealed or restrained by human law—*Rights* derived from the great Legislator of the universe."

The two greatest systems of tyranny devised to hold the common people in subjection, Adams stated, were the canon and feudal law. By the canon law the Roman Catholic Church had kept its followers in "sordid ignorance and staring timidity . . . by infusing in them a religious horror of letters and knowledge." The feudal system for its part was founded on the "servile dependence" of the common people on their lords. The two together had held men's minds and bodies in servitude until the Protestant Reformation raised up an army of faithful men and women to do battle against these ancient partners in iniquity. "It was this great struggle that peopled America . . . it was a love of universal liberty, and a hatred, a dread, a horror, of the infernal confederacy before described, that projected, conducted, and accomplished the settlement of America."

Then followed an eloquent and highly inaccurate description of the character of New England Puritanism as a revolt against tyranny in church and state. The Puritans knew that "government was a plain, simple, intelligible thing, founded in nature and reason, and quite comprehensible by common sense." They demonstrated their enlightenment beyond all cavil by providing a system of education designed to make every man an informed citizen, since, as they knew, "liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people, who have a right, from the frame of their nature, to knowledge."

Beside education the other great prop of a free people was a free press, and Adams paused in his course to praise the Boston *Gazette* as the enemy of arbitrary government. "The true source of our sufferings," he wrote, "has been our timidity. We have been afraid to think. . . . The fact is certain, we have been excessively cautious in giving offense by complaining of grievances." (Governor Bernard must have smiled wryly at that sentence.)

It had been said by the British that "the word *rights* is an offensive expression . . . that the King, his ministry, and Parliament, will not endure to hear the Americans talk of their *rights*." But Americans will not endure in silence the slow erosion of those freedoms which make them proud of the name of Englishmen. "Let us dare to read, think, speak, and write. Let every order and degree among the people arouse their attention and animate their resolution. . . . Let us study the law of nature; search into the spirit of the British constitution; read the histories of the ancient ages; contemplate the great examples of Greece and Rome; set before us the conduct of our own British ancestors, who have defended for us the inherent rights of mankind against foreign and domestic tyrants and usurpers. . . . Let it be known that British liberties are not the grants of princes or parliaments, but the original rights, conditions of original contracts, coequal with prerogative and coeval with government; that many of our rights are inherent and essential, agreed on as maxims and established as preliminaries, even before a Parliament existed. . . . Let the public disputations become researches into the grounds and nature and ends of government, and the means of preserving the good and demolishing the evil. . . . In a word, let every sluice of knowledge be opened and set a-flowing. . . . The prospect now before us in America ought . . . to engage the attention of every man of learning to matters of power and right, that we may be neither led nor driven blindfolded to irretrievable destruction."[1]

If *A Dissertation on Canon and Feudal Law* seemed poor history and the most dubious law, it was exemplary doctrine for patriots and at once was accepted as such. As the articles were unsigned there was widespread speculation about the author. One rumor, especially gratifying to Adams, was that the essay was the work of Jeremiah Gridley. In England, it was published in the London *Chronicle* through the influence of that firm friend of colonial liberties, Thomas Hollis, and the fame of it in the small world of Boston was most satisfying to the anonymous author.

The General Court was to convene in October, when their principal item of business would be the Stamp Act. The representative from Braintree was Adams' old adversary, Eben Thayer. It might be well in an issue of such importance to send an instructed delegate. To do so required a town meeting and to call a town meeting it was necessary to draw up a petition to the selectmen signed by "a number of the respectable inhabitants." Adams hurried about collecting signatures and sounding out the sentiments of his neighbors. The names were procured and the meeting called. John came with a set of instructions in his pocket that he had already drafted. As prime mover, he rose as soon as the moderator had called the meeting to order to explain to his fellow townsmen the reason they had been assembled. Put simply, the liberties of all Americans were endangered by the Stamp Act. If Britain persisted in the act, no American could be secure in his property.

After discussion, a committee with Adams as a member was appointed to draft the instructions. The members withdrew to Mr. Elisha Niles's house and there John produced his draft. It was read and the committee, relieved (as committees generally are) to be freed of the burden of composition, adopted it unanimously without change. The instructions started boldly enough, declaring: "In all the calamities which have ever befallen this country, we have never felt so great a concern, or such alarming apprehensions, as on this occasion." The Stamp Act, along with other late acts of Parliament, have served "to divest us of our most essential rights and liberties." The tax is not only burdensome financially but unconstitutional, because it is a maxim of English law that "no freeman can be separated from his property but by his own act or fault." It thus follows that it is "inconsistent with the spirit of the common law and of the essential fundamental principles of the British constitution that we should be subject to any tax imposed by the British Parliament; because we are not represented in that assembly in any sense. . . ."[2]

From a discussion of the act's unconstitutionality, Adams went on to attack the Admiralty Courts where offenders against the act might be tried without benefit of jury, ending with an injunction to Thayer to support the "most clear and explicit assertion and vindication of our rights and liberties . . . that the world may know, in the present and all future generations, that we have a clear knowledge and a just sense of them, and, with the submission to Divine Providence, that we never can be slaves."

The fame of the instructions soon spread beyond Braintree. Draper, editor of the *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News Letter,* hearing of them, asked Adams for a copy and printed them in his paper where they served as a model for the instructions to delegates from other towns. But there was a higher accolade in store for John. Stopping in on Samuel Adams on a trip to Boston, he found him at his desk laboring over a set of instructions for the Boston representatives. The older man confessed he was afraid that his desire to strike off an extraordinary statement might induce him to go too far, and he thus welcomed Adams' advice. John read the instructions and then showed his friend his own. Samuel's instructions, in his view, were fine as far as they went, but they did not go far enough. The Boston patriot agreed with his country cousin and inserted some of John's points in his own instructions.

The General Court, when it met, was bold and firm. The Stamp Act Congress, meeting at Philadelphia, somewhat astonished at its own temerity, followed the lead of Samuel Adams and James Otis and declared its unequivocal opposition to the Stamp Act, insisting that "no taxes have ever been or can be constitutionally imposed on the colonists but by their respective legislatures."

Yet there was widespread apprehension and anxiety among the patriots. Would Parliament, the Crown and the ministers swallow their pride and repeal the act, or would it be enforced at the point of a bayonet in the hands of a British soldier? If so, it would mean war against the Mother Country, for the colonists had gone too far in their opposition to turn back. In the last weeks of the waning year, Adams reviewed the events of the preceding months. "The year 1765," he noted in his diary, "has been the most remarkable year of my life. . . . In every colony, from Georgia to New Hampshire . . . the stamp distributors and inspectors have been compelled by the unconquerable rage of the people to renounce their offices. Such and so universal has been the resentment of the people that every man who has dared to speak in favor of the stamps . . . how great soever his abilities and virtues had been esteemed before . . . has been seen to sink into universal contempt and ignominy." The people from the highest to the lowest ranks had become "more attentive to their liberties, more inquisitive about them, and more determined to defend them, than they were ever before known or had occasion to be."

But the resistance, general as it had been, did not satisfy Adams. The courts remained suspended, the custom-house closed, unable to do business without stamps and prevented from using them. How long, Adams asked, could the colony "remain in this languid condition, this passive obedience to the Stamp Act?" "It is my opinion," he added, "that by this inactivity we discover cowardice and too much respect to the act."

The suspension of the courts and the stagnation of business affected merchants, lawyers and artisans alike. It had been a month since John Adams had drawn a writ and he wrote gloomily that the "long interval of indolence and idleness will make a large chasm in my affairs if it should not reduce me to distress." He and Abigail must retrench expenses and practice a more rigid economy.

The interruption caused by the Stamp Act was a most unfortunate one for Adams who, as he expressed it, "was but just getting into my gears, just getting under sail" as a lawyer, when "an embargo is laid upon the ship." He indulged himself in a little self-pity as he considered the thirty years he had spent in preparation for his career. For thirty years he had struggled with poverty, with the "envy and jealousy and malice of enemies." With few friends to assist him, he "groped in dark obscurity" and had "just become known, and gained a small degree of reputation" when the Stamp Act "was set on foot for my ruin as well as that of America in general, and of Great Britain."[3]

In the midst of such dark reflections, a Boston constable appeared with a message from the town clerk of the city, notifying Adams that he, Jeremiah Gridley and James Otis were requested by the town to appear before the Governor in Council to support a petition to open the provincial courts of law. He was surprised at the invitation, joining him, "at a distance and unknown as I am," with two of the greatest lawyers in the colony. He doubtless owed his choice to Gridley, but it seemed to him as if a kind of invisible law was at work drawing him into the center of the political maelstrom, and fixing him in a leading role.

He spent the next day in consultation with Gridley and Otis and at the Town House with the Boston committee and other interested gentlemen. A request had been dispatched to the Governor asking for a hearing and after dark, while the group sat in candlelight still debating the issue, a message came to Samuel Adams that His Excellency and the Council were ready to hear the memorial of the town of Boston and the counsel in support of it. Adams, with Otis and Gridley, ascended to the council chamber where the Governor sat resplendent in his robes surrounded by his councilors. Rather curtly, he directed the three lawyers to so divide their arguments as to avoid repetition. At this Gridley announced that he would go last and develop those points untouched by his colleagues. Otis then indicated he would take second place and Adams, to his consternation, found himself opening the argument upon the tangled question without a moment's preparation. He had made notes earlier in the day and armed with these he made a shaky start. The Stamp Act, he insisted, was invalid. The law provided a remedy for every wrong. A law that did not do so was no proper law. Moreover, the law could not require what was impossible or vain. To procure the stamp papers was manifestly impossible, and to interrupt justice for that reason would accomplish no practical end. He finished, convinced that he had made a poor case and poor impression. Otis followed and directed his attention to the nature of the judges' oaths which, he maintained, obliged them to administer the law if it was in any way possible. Gridley, for his part, dwelt on the inconvenience that would be caused by the interruption of justice.

In answer, the Governor pled the inability of the Council to instruct the courts. He and the Council represented the Crown. The judges would reject an effort of the Crown to instruct them how they should interpret the law and by the same token they must rebuff Governor and Council. The issue was thus passed back to the courts with the Governor's suggestion that the judges of the inferior courts throughout the counties should decide it as soon as possible.

When Otis, Adams and Gridley reported the decision to the Boston meeting next morning, there was a warm debate and it was resolved that the town's counsels who were present should give their opinion on the proper steps to be taken. Adams was called on first and confessed that the problem was such a complicated one that he dared not "give any opinion positively . . . without the most mature deliberation." Otis was equally uncertain and the town voted to adjourn until the following Thursday to allow its counsels time to decide upon a course of action.

Adams, ruminating on the procedure most likely to meet with success, decided to advise the town to follow three separate and parallel courses: first, to ask the Governor in Council to sit as supreme court of probate to pass on the question of whether the officers of the probate courts in the Province could conduct their business without stamps; second, to present the same question to the judges of the Superior Court; and, finally, to place the problem, as the Governor had advised, before the Inferior Court of Suffolk County. If a prompt answer were not forthcoming from these bodies, the town should request the Governor to call a convention of the two houses of the legislature and, if this request was refused, to try to call one on the authority of the town.

One light in which the issue might be seen was to declare that since the King is the fountain of justice, and it is a maxim of the law that the King by the constitution never dies; and since, further, protection and allegiance are reciprocal, the colonists were, through the suspension, out of the protection of the King and, as a consequence, discharged from their allegiance. Then the dangerous conclusion: "Are not all the ligaments of government dissolved? Is it not an abdication of the throne? In short where will such an horrid doctrine terminate? It would run us into treason!" If, indeed, it had not already.

Between submission and independence there was a narrow and hazardous path; it would take much patience to tread it safely and nothing but armed resistance would avail the colonies if England proved irreconcilable.

A few days later, perplexed and unhappy, he rode up to Boston and spent a frustrating morning looking for his fellow counselors, Gridley and Otis. Searching for them at Samuel Adams', he found his cousin about to leave his office for a meeting of the Monday Night Club. Samuel proposed that John join him and the two went off together. At the club they found, among others, Otis; Thomas Cushing, speaker of the House; Harrison Gray, the Treasurer of the Province; and Samuel Pemberton, pastor of the Old North Church. It was a distinguished company, but the talk was all politics with "many curious anecdotes about governors, councilors, representatives, demagogues, merchants, etc." The members were cordial to their young guest and he, for once a little overawed, satisfied himself with careful assessments of their characters and capacities. Gray he marked down as a man of "very tender mind . . . extremely timid." The Treasurer indeed declared himself unfit for the job he held and expressed his intention of resigning. Cushing, a big-billed, sardonic-looking man with a lantern jaw, held a kind of informal office as procurer of intelligence for the patriot side. A steady, discreet, rather secretive man, he was an astute politician and clever strategist. Otis, whose measure he had taken many times before, impressed Adams anew with his unpredictable temper—"his imagination flames, his passions blaze." It seemed to his young admirer that, acting now on a stage before the world, Otis made more of an effort to take the broader and the higher view.

Yet Samuel Adams, mild as milk, quiet, prudent, with a strange delicacy of manner, a soft persuasiveness, had the keenest grasp of the temper and character of the people. Not a deep student of law or of constitutional principles, his study had been rather the obscure secrets of the human heart. He was that strange and dangerous type, a lover of humanity. An unsuccessful tax collector, a poor provider for a large family, this stout, untidy man had, like Otis, the discomfiting eye of the zealot. To John, who set himself to learn all his cousin had to teach, he was the purest of patriots, "of refined policy, steadfast integrity, exquisite humanity, genteel erudition, obliging, engaging manners." Although the Monday Night Club had no solution to offer for the colony's dilemma, the evening was a feast to John Adams.

December 25 he noted in his diary: "Christmas. At home. Thinking, reading, searching, concerning taxation without consent, concerning the great pause and rest in business." Still he found time to go with Abigail and Nabby to drink tea at Colonel Quincy's—now, familiarly, "Grandfather" Quincy. There the old gentleman questioned him closely about the hearing before the Governor and Council. How had the Secretary looked and behaved? And the Governor? And what did John make of the

Council's decision? While the men discussed politics, old Mrs. Quincy was "merry and chatty as ever, with her stories out of the newspapers."

John meanwhile persuaded Boston to follow his campaign. At the town's behest the Court of Common Pleas addressed itself to the issue; the Superior Court postponed and continued the question, hoping to be bailed out by word from England, while at the meeting of the Inferior Court at Plymouth, John and Robert Treat Paine did such effective missionary work among their fellow lawyers that the bar joined unanimously in recommending to the court that it proceed without the stamps. The court, remote from the eye of the Governor, acceded and business was done, though there was little enough of it.

For the rest there was nothing to do but wait and pray. John, in durance at Braintree, fretted about the Tories in town. Parson Wibird, increasingly eccentric, seemed, to the dismay of most of his congregation, to tremble on the brink of Toryism. The handful of Anglicans in the town were of course lost beyond recall. Mr. Veasey insisted that the Americans must pay their fair share of the expenses of empire and Joseph Cleverly, John's old mentor, dared to say that Parliament had a right to tax the colonists. On the other hand, Adams could savor the news of resolute action in other colonies as evidence of colonial unity.

So the year ran out and John noted in the diary: "Tomorrow is the last day of a year in which America has shown such magnanimity and spirit as never before appeared in any country." And on the first day of the new year he wrote, "We are now upon the beginning of a year of greater expectation than any that has passed before it. This year brings ruin or salvation to the British Colonies. The eyes of all America are fixed on the British Parliament. In short, Britain and America are staring at each other—and they will probably stare more and more for some time."[4]

Braintree saw in the new year of 1766 with severe cold and a great storm of snow; John, the stream frozen solid, "waddled through the snow driving my cattle to water at Dr. Savil's—a fine piece of glowing exercise," and came home nipped red by the wind to warm himself by the fire, enjoy Abigail's fussing over his exertions and spend the evening in a "cheerful chat" with his brother Boylston as though there were no Stamp Acts or Parliament in the world.

The news from England, largely in the form of rumor, was encouraging. Merchants and mechanics were expressing open opposition to the act. John Wentworth, Governor of New Hampshire and a classmate of John's, wrote to his uncle that the Marquis of Rockingham had told him that he would favor the repeal of a hundred Stamp Acts before he would "run the risk of such confusions as would be caused by enforcing it."

With business slack, Adams improved the time by answering in the pages of the Boston *Gazette* the essays of an English author who took the title William Pym. In responding Adams adopted the pen name of Clarendon. The Earl of Clarendon, the great historian of the English Civil War and a leader in the events of that conflict, was a moderate, a man who fought hard to prevent the Revolution of 1640 from running to excess, a man who opposed the dogmas of the sectaries, went into exile at the time of Cromwell, and helped to bring Charles II back to the throne of England. That Adams chose that pseudonym was an index to his determination to take a moderate line in the struggle with Great Britain.

The articles themselves were a review of the patriot interpretation of the British constitution. In them Adams reached out to join hands with all true Englishmen who, he was sure, would not countenance the efforts of "a few abandoned villains" to chain and fetter the American colonists. "If ever an infant country deserved to be cherished," he wrote, "it is America. If ever a people merited honor and happiness they are her inhabitants. They are a people whom no character can flatter or transmit in any expressions equal to their merit and virtue; with the high sentiments of the Romans . . . they have the tender feelings of humanity and the noble benevolence of Christians; they have the most habitual, radical sense of liberty, and the highest reverence for virtue; they are descended from a race of heroes, who, placing their confidence in Providence alone, set the seas and skies, monsters and savages, tyrants and devils, at defiance for the sake of religion and liberty."[5]

More and more the center of Adams' attention shifted from Braintree to Boston. He was not insensible of the fact that his prominent part in the Stamp Act agitation had attracted general attention to him. He began to dine about and to meet more of the men who had weight in the affairs of the Province: at his friend Joseph Dudley's he met Gridley; John Lowell of Newburyport, a young legal trainee; a poet and dilettante named Fayerweather—"one of the genteel folks"; and that evening at his cousin Samuel's house he talked with "brother [Samuel] Swift," a radical leader of Boston's North End. The next noon he dined at the home of the town clerk, William Cooper, with Thomas Cushing—"silent and sly as usual"; William Story, the unhappy registrar of the Admiralty Court; and a cousin, John Boylston, who amused himself by poking fun at Nick Boylston's luxurious tastes. The evening was spent in good company at Cunningham's. The following day, after dining alone with Isaac Smith, an uncle of Abigail's, he went on to a meeting of the Sons of Liberty. There, crowded into the small office of the Chase and Speakman distillery, John ticked off John Avery, a merchant or distiller; John Smith, a brazier; Thomas Crafts, a painter; Benjamin Edes, printer of the Boston *Gazette;* George Trott, a jeweler; and Joseph Field, a ship's master. These were the artisans and small tradesmen who comprised the backbone of the patriotic organization. To be invited to attend their meeting was a conspicuous mark of their confidence and John felt, in a way, as though he were on trial. The support of men like these would bring him law business and advance his political ambitions. So he observed closely and said little. The conversation was "polite" and social and the group enjoyed "punch, wine, pipes and tobacco, biscuit and cheese." John heard no plots or machinations. The meeting concerned itself rather with what steps should be taken to celebrate the news of the repeal of the Stamp Act, news which they confidently expected. The grandiose plans called for the illumination of all houses with candles, bonfires at strategic points, pyramids, obelisks and "such fireworks as were never before seen in America."

The day after, in contrast, John had an elaborate noonday dinner at the home of Nick Boylston with Tom Boylston, Isaac Smith, Benjamin Hallowell and their wives. The company was served an elegant meal by liveried butlers and then inspected the house whose furniture alone, Boylston told them, had cost a thousand pounds sterling. To John the house seemed like a prince's palace—"the turkey carpets, the painted hangings, the marble tables, the rich beds with crimson damask curtains and counterpanes, the beautiful chimney clock, the spacious garden" were the most sumptuous objects he had ever seen. Their host, while a warm friend of Hutchinson and one of the Governor's supporters, proved to be an amusing storyteller with a gift for mimicry. His cousin Tom, "a perfect viper, a fiend, a Jew, a devil, but . . . orthodox in politics," was opposed to both (although in later years he turned loyalist); Hallowell, comptroller of customs in Boston, occasionally made subtle insinuations about the integrity of Otis and Samuel Adams.[6] Thus much of the forenoon was occupied in lively, sometimes heated discussion; the evening passed likewise for John at Bracket's tavern, listening to James Otis' account of the Stamp Act Congress at New York.

The time so spent was not time lost for John Adams. From his cousin Samuel he had already learned to evaluate a man in terms of future dependability, to measure his orthodoxy and assess his firmness. How might he be useful? What were his loyalties, his talents, his attachments, his vanities and foibles? Resistance to authority was not work for boys or mobs. If Massachusetts was to stand fast, it would not be by sudden effusions of emotion, riots or processions and bonfires. It would require wise management, forethought and careful planning. John's brain became a filing cabinet in which he noted the bold and tenacious, the timid, the open Tories, the waverers.

March, in Braintree, was town meeting time. The sap began to run in the maple trees, the sluggish winter blood to stir, and politicians to consider their avocation. Joseph Cleverly was about the town, full of schemes and projects—to add two new selectmen, to separate the offices of constable and tax collector, to raise the poor rates. Adams took a dim view of the schoolmaster's activities. He was too much of a trimmer to suit John. Norton Quincy, son of the Colonel, and Eben Thayer seemed too deeply entrenched to be ousted, and Deacon James Penniman had strong support as the third selectman; but Cleverly's plan to add two selectmen offered an unexpected opportunity. It was the hope of the Cleverly faction to return Thayer, to replace Penniman with one of their own men, and to elect Major Ebenezer Miller, a friend of the government, as one of the new selectmen. Quietly John's own supporters, led by his brother Boylston, began lining up votes. Boylston showed considerable ingenuity in recruiting some of the young fellows of the town, ardent patriots, who, pleased to be in the political swim, scurried about lining up backers for Adams "and put about a great many votes."

After the meeting of March 3, 1766 was convened, six men were nominated for the offices, six hats were placed on the railing in front of the deacons' seats, and the members of the meeting filed by and dropped in their ballots. When the votes were tallied Quincy, Thayer, Penniman and Adams were the selectmen. Major Miller was roundly defeated and Eben Thayer had held onto his seat by the skin of his teeth.

John heard that many persons among his adherents as well as among his enemies had acted "slyly and deceitfully," but he consoled himself with the observation that "this is always the case." The victory seemed to him a vindication by his neighbors of the stand that he had taken on the Stamp Act. On the other hand it marked the rise in Braintree of two clearly defined parties—those determined to stand up for what they conceived to be their inherent and unalienable and constitutional rights, and those who preferred to stand with the representatives of the Crown and Parliament. Feelings were already so tender that John Bass, friend and supporter of Major Miller, declared flatly he would never come to another town meeting, and Joseph Cleverly, his bid for political power thwarted and his schemes overthrown, moped about declaring that there was no accounting for the strange behavior of his fellow townsmen. Would the Anglicans, their champion defeated, become Adams' irreconcilable opponents, or might he pick up a few votes in that area? Would Thayer's friends be demoralized and disheartened by his narrow victory or would they redouble their efforts in his behalf? Another factor which might work in John's favor was simply Thayer's long dominance of town affairs. Once the erosion of power begins it develops a momentum of its own. Voters generally show a disposition to abandon a sinking politician. So it might be with Thayer. Word soon reached John of panic in the Thayer camp. Adams heard that Benjamin Cleverly, Joseph's brother, had approached young John Ruggles and solicited his vote for Thayer at the May election for representative to the General Court. Cleverly would give Ruggles all he could eat and drink if he would vote for Thayer. It was only Ruggles' slavish subordination to Thomas Newcomb, Cleverly hinted slyly, that had prevailed on him to vote for Adams at the March meeting.

John's new duties kept him busy. An immediate issue before the selectmen concerned the schools: first, what proportion of the school money each parish was to have, obviously a most ticklish question. Then Thomas Faxon was urging that there should be a number of dame schools in place of the grammar school. John suspected that the suggestion was not entirely disinterested. Faxon's wife was ambitious to be a schoolmistress. The question of the poor, as always, was a tangled one. There were a number of people who had applied for the privilege of supplying the poor with wood, corn, meat and bread. To choose one over another might well be to make or to lose a possible ally in the May election. Most perplexing and explosive of all was the matter of tax assessment. Here John was determined to be scrupulously fair whatever the political cost: "I must inquire a great while," he noted, "before I shall know the polls and estates, real and personal, of all the inhabitants of the town or parish."

The highways—the district to be surveyed, the laying out of new roads and the altering of old ones—was another tedious and touchy issue. In all such matters there were particular interests involved. Whether a road should go by the land of X or Y might become a matter that, before it was settled, would excite the emotions of half the town and, quite literally, turn brother against brother. Proud, suspicious people, the citizens of Braintree, like the citizens of larger precincts, were often selfish and narrow and, it sometimes seemed, congenitally contentious. They kept a jealous eye on their unpaid officials and a selectman remained in office by virtue of his dexterity in balancing between a dozen or more petty factions as much as by his ability to act justly and wisely. But there were obvious compensations for a politically ambitious young man; as John wrote, "it will increase my connections with the people," and thus it might recommend him to the electorate as the proper representative for Braintree in some future election.

Stopping at John Bass's shortly after his election, John encountered his defeated rival, Major Miller. There both men meticulously observed another political convention—however heated the battle in courtroom or town meeting, the forms required an ungrudging affability in social intercourse. The two men thus looked at each other, in Adams' words, "without wrath or shame or guilt," and passed the time in pleasant banter.

The January packet from England brought Pitt's speech in Commons against the Stamp Act. To Adams, as he read the eloquent phrases, Pitt appeared as "the genius and guardian angel of Britain and British America." He had called the hated act "the most impolitic, arbitrary, oppressive, and unconstitutional act that ever was passed." Had Otis or Sam Adams gone as far? John, like the rest of his countrymen, waited impatiently for the latest news, devouring every item from the English journals. It was maddening to have to follow the battle for repeal in Parliament from a distance of three thousand miles. At the moment when their fate had already been decided, they were poring over accounts months old. In the bill for repeal, reported in the April papers, John noted immediately an article which declared most emphatically "that King, lord, and Commons have an undoubted right to make laws for the colonies *in all cases whatever.*" Here was a seed of future trouble. This was the hinge of the whole controversy. If Parliament was indisposed to yield on this point, or not content to state it simply as a principle and disregard it in practice, it mattered very little whether the Stamp Act were repealed or not. There would be other acts in other years; there could be no permanent and enduring peace between England and her American colonies.

And there was another straw to show how the English wind was blowing. The London *Gazette* of January 8 contained an essay which set about, with much show of logic and erudition, to prove conclusively that the American colonists were, in effect and in fact, represented in Parliament and therefore might be taxed like any citizen of Manchester. The magic word, in this instance, was "virtually." They were virtually represented and thus swindled out of all their cherished rights. Once the British ministry had stopped its ears with "virtual," the colonists might trouble heaven with their bootless cries and pour petitions like a flood upon King and Parliament alike. It would avail them nothing.

The Superior Court persevered in its determination not to hear cases and Adams hardened his heart against Hutchinson as its Chief Justice. The court had resorted to "chicanery . . . prevarication . . . insincerity . . . lies and falsehoods. . . . The times are terrible, and made so at present by Hutchinson, Chief Justice." Nor did the news that the Stamp Act was repealed, news which reached Boston on the nineteenth of May, much improve things, although the city was at once abandoned to general rejoicing. Abigail, who had looked forward to going to Boston to see the celebration, was kept home by Nabby, who was ill with the whooping cough, and thrifty Braintree set off not so much as a Roman candle. John had to attend court in Plymouth and, passing through Hingham, with the church bells ringing, the militia cannon firing, and drums beating to announce the great event, he allowed himself only a cautious and measured satisfaction. More important in his eyes than the repeal of the Stamp Act was the news of the overthrow, in county after county, of those representatives in the General Court who had supported the Governor and Council on the Stamp Act issue. Plymouth County made a "thorough purgation" and Suffolk did almost as well.

When the General Court met to elect the Governor's Council, Samuel Adams was chosen clerk of the House and Otis speaker. Governor Bernard exercised his authority and vetoed Otis. Thomas Cushing was then chosen in his place and the delegates proceeded to the election of councilors. Hutchinson was dropped and the two Olivers; they were replaced with enemies of the administration. Five of the new councilors were rejected by the Governor, who made the two houses "a most nitrous, sulphurous speech." Repeal of the Stamp Act had brought an armed truce rather than peace. Moreover, it left in its wake the matter of compensation for those who, like Hutchinson, had suffered heavy losses from the action of the mob. This the King had requested and justice required. But it proved a hard pill for many patriots to swallow.

Through the summer of 1766, with the Superior Court open once more and the inferior courts bustling with cases, Adams' time was taken increasingly with his practice, his duties as a selectman, and the cultivation of his farm. For the time being politics were pushed aside. Never far from his thoughts, they were sternly subordinated to what were, for the moment, more pressing concerns. The time with Abigail and Nabby was especially precious; in August, John and his wife, leaving the baby at Weymouth, took a trip to Salem, stopping at Medford and Taunton to visit friends. In Salem they made their headquarters at the Richard Cranches', and Mary and Abigail renewed their happy intimacy as sisters. For John and Abigail it was a kind of honeymoon; they marveled over the handsome common and elegant houses of Salem, traveled to the Neck, climbed Witches Hill and looked out over the distant fields and woods and towns and inlets that lay slumberous in the warm blue air of late summer afternoon. At Marblehead they walked the narrow, picturesque streets together and took note of the grand mansions of merchant captains. They even had their portraits painted by a local artist, Benjamin Blyth, stiff, awkward limnings, done somewhat in the style of tavern signs. But the best part of their brief vacation was the time spent with "dear brother Cranch" at his house overlooking the harbor. There John and Richard discussed politics or listened to the sisters talk about "ribbon, catgut, and Paris net, riding hoods, cloth, silk, and lace."

John attended court and, as usual, took careful note of the principal characters of the town. Deacon Timothy Pickering was famous for his writings on church polity, but Adams remarked his "hypocritical demure. . . . His mouth makes a semicircle when he puts on [his] devout face." The deacon reminded him of Governor Endicott's portrait hanging in the Boston council chamber: "they are puritanical faces," he wrote. So the days were spent at court, sight-seeing and visiting, the evenings in pleasant company with the town's leading citizens. At William Pynchon's he met Colonel Saltonstall, Jonathan Sewall, and Nathaniel Sargeant of Methuen, Oxenbridge Thacher's favorite student; the men refreshed themselves with good talk and "punch, wine, bread and cheese, apples, pipes and tobacco," while the population of Salem observed a noisy celebration of Guy Fawkes Day or Pope's Day as it was called in New England.

VIII

WITH THE Stamp Act repealed, Adams turned from politics for a time. Writing to Richard Cranch, "Dear Brother," he started to inquire about "the court atmosphere" and the latest comments on the Lieutenant Governor and then checked himself. "Upon second thought," he added, "I don't care whether I hear anything of the last matters or not; for to tell you a secret, I am amazingly changed—since the Stamp Act is repealed . . . I am at perfect ease about politics. I care not a shilling who is in and who is out." As for his studies, they were again under a handicap. The friends had agreed to rise at four in the morning and read, meditate and write before the birds were up, but John's plans were frustrated by Abigail who, determined to guard his sleep and health, closed the shutters so that he dozed on until seven o'clock.

On July 11, almost two years to the day after the birth of Nabby, a baby boy was born and named John Quincy after Abigail's grandfather. Once again the household routine centered on an infant before whose engaging tyranny everyone bowed.

The calm brought by the repeal of the Stamp Act proved short-lived. In England, the flashy and mercurial Charles Townshend, Chancellor of the Exchequer, undertook to bring the colonists into line. He would extract a revenue from the colonies where his predecessor had failed. When Grenville in parliamentary debate suggested that he dare not tax the colonies, Townshend stamped his foot petulantly and cried, "I will, I will." And he did. He fashioned and steered through Commons and Lords an omnibus bill that reaffirmed the legality of the writs of assistance, established new vice-admiralty courts, set up a Board of Customs Commissioners in Boston responsible directly to the British Treasury, and, finally, to insure his fame, imposed a new schedule of duties on specific goods imported into the colonies. Prominent on the list were tea, glass, lead, paints and paper. Rather speciously Townshend fastened on a distinction made by some colonial spokesman at the time of the Stamp Act between internal and external taxes. The stamp tax had been rejected by the Americans, he argued, because it was an internal tax. The right of Britain to control American trade had never been seriously contested. The import duties, if they were not designed strictly speaking to control trade, were at least applied in an area where the colonists had long been used to the principle of parliamentary action.

It was here then that pressure might be applied. But Townshend made the error of being too clever—an easy mistake for bright and superficial politicians to make. To the colonists the issue was once again "taxation without representation"—internal or external, it made no difference. The response of Boston was prompt. On October 28, 1767, a town meeting was called with Otis as the moderator and there the citizens voted not to import or to use any of the dutied articles. A committee was appointed to persuade the leading merchants to subscribe to nonimportation and another to draw up a circular letter to be sent to all the colonies enlisting them in the campaign.

John Adams was incensed by the passage of the Townshend duties but not surprised. His resolution to eschew politics flew out the window. Although he was not directly involved, he followed the activities of Otis and Samuel Adams closely and conferred with them as often as he went to Boston.

Soon after the turn of the year Adams decided to move with his family to Boston. In his diary he ran another audit of his plans and prospects. "To what object are my views directed?" he asked himself. "What is the end and purpose of my studies, journeys, labors of all kinds of body and mind, of tongue and pen? Am I grasping at money or scheming for power?" Was it his own prestige and importance that he sought through his political activities "or the welfare of my country?" The day-to-day demands of life were so insistent that, as he wrote, "I have not leisure and tranquillity enough to consider distinctly my own views, objects and feelings." His present concern was to build a library. This, in itself, took time and thought and, above all, money. Even then he still could not be sure that his motives were of the purest. A library was only an instrument; it could be used to acquire "fame, fortune, power" as well as to serve "God, country, clients, fellow men."[1] Which of these was his own true motive—fortune or service? Simply to ask the question was to arm oneself against complacency and self-seeking. The heart of man was, as Jeremiah had said many centuries before, "desperately wicked and deceitful above all things." The Devil stood at man's elbow, eager to encourage him to delude himself, to cover ambition with a veneer of disinterestedness, to mask vanity with self-righteousness. If the Devil could prevail here, if he could close the ears of his victim, not so much to the voice of conscience as to the nature of his own sinful propensities, dull the victim's awareness of how readily the good became corrupted, how strong was the impulse at self-justification and how dangerous, his job was more than half done. John Adams was Puritan enough to know that there is no self-justification; that justification was God's, and yet, and yet, he was often tempted and as often drew back. There was a danger even in the candor of the diary. He might commit his doubts to his journal and rise feeling already slightly sanctified.

And as soon as one ventured on the wider stage of political action all the pitfalls, the temptations to vanity, self-deception and betrayal of principle that every man experienced in his personal and social life, were multiplied a hundredfold. It was, of a consequence, far harder to retain in public life a sure sense of one's own identity, far easier to lose the essence of the self, to be lost in history, the same history in which man had to find a home amidst the wilderness of time. A great deal of this apprehension was summed up in John's steadfast determination to be an independent man. To be genuinely independent meant to be real, to be unentangled, to preserve the true self.

And then, after such doubts, the characteristic reflection: "I am certain, however, that the course I pursue will neither lead me to fame, fortune, power, nor to the service of my friends, clients, or country. What plan of reading or reflection, or business, can be pursued by a man who is now at Pownalborough, then at Martha's Vineyard, next at Boston, then at Taunton, presently at Barnstable, then at Concord, now at Salem, then at Cambridge, and afterwards at Worcester. . . . What a dissipation must this be? Is it possible to pursue a regular train of thinking in this desultory life? By no means. . . . Here and there and everywhere, a rambling, roving, vagrant, vagabond life. A wandering life. At Mein's bookstore, at Bowes's shop, at Dana's house, at Fitch's, Otis' office, and the clerk's office in the court chamber, in the gallery, at my own fire, I am thinking on the same plan." That is to say, on no plan. How could a man pursue his studies and at the same time carry forward a career and a revolution?[2]

Politics and business both called Adams to Boston. His patriot friends had urged the move ever since the days of the Stamp Act agitation, but John had held back in part because of his strong emotional ties to Braintree and even more because of anxiety about his health. A valetudinarian by his early twenties, he not unnaturally wished to preserve a life that, in his view, hung by a slender thread. Braintree was country, Boston was city. The country was classically, proverbially healthy; the city with its noxious odors, throat-rasping smog, and crowded dwellings was a place of infection and disease. However, he finally decided, with many misgivings, to try his luck in the metropolis. He declined to stand for re-election as selectman in Braintree, rented a house on Brattle Square, called locally "the White House," and moved Abigail, Johnny and Nabby, with the maid, Rachael Marsh, into their new urban quarters.

The Adamses moved into turmoil, for the legislature, called into session reluctantly by Governor Bernard, was up in arms, framing petitions, dispatching a circular letter to other assemblies, contending with the Governor over its rights. This time the government responded with vigor. Bernard condemned the circular letter as seditious and dissolved the General Court. The customs officials of the city, meanwhile, alarmed at the uproar over the duties, wrote to England expressing concern over their personal safety. The fractious spirit of the colonies, and of Massachusetts in particular, must be curbed or soon there would be no English authority worth the name. Lord Hillsborough, the choleric Secretary for the Colonies, supported Bernard's action and deplored the circular letters as a work "of the most dangerous and factious tendency," obviously designed to promote an illegal combination of colonies in resistance to the Crown. A new General Court must vote to rescind their resolutions or be dissolved in turn like their predecessors. General Gage, commander-in-chief of the royal forces in America, was ordered to "strengthen the ends of the government in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, enforce a due obedience of the laws," and protect the officials of the colony in the discharge of their duties.

When Bernard, acting on Hillsborough's orders, directed the General Court to rescind the offensive letter, they refused by a vote of 92 to 17, inspiring Paul Revere to fashion a memorial silver punch bowl "To the Glorious 92, who ignoring the insolent menaces of villains in power, voted NOT TO RESCIND." The punch bowl, placed in the Bunch of Grapes Tavern, fortified many patriots in the months ahead.

Meanwhile, the appeals for help from the customs commissioners were met by dispatching the frigate *Romney* from Halifax to Boston. There, the customs officers, emboldened by its formidable presence, decided to act on the report that a wharf official had been locked in a cabin of John Hancock's sloop *Liberty* while madeira wine was landed without paying duties. They ordered the *Liberty* seized and anchored under the guns of the *Romney* while court proceedings were initiated against the ship and its owner. John Hancock, Adams' childhood friend and son of the minister of Braintree, had inherited a fortune from his merchant uncle, Thomas Hancock, and established himself as one of the most successful merchants of the city and the principal financial backer of the patriot cause. When word of the seizure reached the Boston mob it swarmed down around the customs officers like angry bees. Those gentlemen betook themselves hastily to the fortress of Castle William in the harbor.

The city was soon bubbling over with rumor and alarm. Another town meeting was called which, overflowing Faneuil Hall, then adjourned to the Old South Meeting House where Otis was elected moderator once again. When the crowd had packed itself into the barnlike interior of the Old South, lining walls and jamming the balconies, some of those present, remembering John Adams as the author of the widely reprinted Braintree instructions, named him to a similar committee to draw up instructions for the newly elected Boston delegates to the General Court, and it thus fell to Adams to draft the document. His opening paragraph stated the matter plainly enough: "After the repeal of the late American Stamp Act," he wrote, "we are happy in the pleasing prospect of a restoration of that tranquillity and unanimity among ourselves, and that harmony and affection between our parent country and us, which had generally subsisted before that detestable act. But with the utmost grief and concern we find that we flattered ourselves too soon, and that the root of bitterness is yet alive. The principle on which that act was founded continues in full force, and a revenue is still demanded from America."

Americans had the "mortification" of seeing "one act after another" of Parliament "passed for the express purpose of raising a revenue from us . . . without our consent." But the colonists, despite such provocations, were determined to reaffirm their loyalty to "our most gracious sovereign, a reverence and due subordination to the British Parliament, as the supreme legislative in all cases of necessity, for the preservation of the whole empire, and our cordial and sincere affection for our parent country."

The expression of respect and deference was followed by the avowal that it was the colonists' "unalterable resolution . . . to assert and vindicate our dear and invaluable rights and liberties, at the utmost hazard of our lives and fortunes." That said it plainly enough. The King or his ministers might read in those bold words the fate of their shortsighted and inflexible policy.

If such words were not explicit enough, the colonists' principal grievances were spelled out in detail. The Province was already besieged by "a multitude of placemen and pensioners, and an enormous train of underlings and dependents," and Bostonians were smarting under "their imperious tempers, their rash, inconsiderate, and weak behavior." The *Romney* herself had appeared for the plain purpose of overawing the citizens. Then, most offensive of all, in clear defiance of the due process of the law, "without any libel or prosecution whatever being instituted against her," the *Liberty* had been seized as she lay at her wharf. All these things the Boston representatives must consider, including the impressment of American sailors off colonial ships. In addition they must investigate the rumors that British troops were being dispatched from Halifax to garrison the city.

On the seventeenth of July the instructions were submitted to the town meeting and unanimously adopted. Printed and circulated through the Province, they did their bit to harden the temper of the colonists. The Governor was called upon shortly after the meeting to answer the rumor that four regiments of troops were on the way to Boston, and requested to convene the General Court. When he refused the Boston town meeting decided to call a convention of the towns of the colony to meet in September at Faneuil Hall. To give some sanction to this daring move its promoters announced that the convention would, among other things, discuss measures that might be taken to meet a wholly imaginary threat from the French.

Adams was riding the fall circuit in Worcester and the western part of the state when delegates from ninety-two towns met to deliberate on what steps should be taken to block the offensive duties and forestall the landing of troops. The situation was an explosive one. Extremists were for mustering the countryside for open resistance to the redcoats, but Otis and Samuel Adams kept a close rein on the delegates. It was apparent to them that armed opposition would be worse than useless. It would isolate Boston from the rest of the colonies and perhaps from the rest of the Province and provide the British with a pretext to try the patriot leaders for treason.

Once it became apparent that the convention would do nothing treasonable, the leaders turned their attention to the framing of more petitions, remonstrances, and resolves, firmly but respectfully expressed. After six carefully managed days, the first provincial convention of Massachusetts adjourned. Its principal accomplishment was that it had remained within the bounds of legality. Beyond that it had, after all, met and deliberated. Even if its deliberations had come to very little, patriots from many of the towns of the Province had joined together in an act that expressed their solidarity; delegates from Hampton Falls and Springfield had gained new confidence and courage from their common enterprise, and forged a weapon that might be used in the fight to protect the colonists' rights as Englishmen.

On the day the convention adjourned, two regiments of British soldiers were landed at the Boston wharves while the inhabitants watched in a gloomy, anxious silence that only a few of the bolder spirits dared break by hoots and catcalls. From the wharves the soldiers marched with loaded muskets and fixed bayonets, drums rolling and regimental flags unfurled, to the Common where one regiment encamped while the other took up quarters in Faneuil Hall.

Adams arrived back from circuit to find Boston full of troops, virtually an occupied city. Dr. Byles, famous for his puns, was quoted widely as having observed that Great Britain had indeed "redressed" colonial grievances. One regiment chose Brattle Square, directly in front of the Adams house, for its drill. As Adams wrote, "the spirit-stirring drum and ear-piercing fife aroused me and my family early enough every morning, and the indignation they excited, though somewhat soothed, was not allayed by the sweet songs, violins and flutes of the serenading Sons of Liberty under my windows in the evening." In his study John could not forget for a moment the dramatic opposition between England and the Province of Massachusetts Bay.

Soon after Adams' return from circuit Jonathan Sewall came to dinner. Sewall, with his bright and merry ways, was one of John's most intimate friends. He stood next only to Richard Cranch in the warmth of their relationship. It was obvious as soon as he arrived at the Brattle Street house that he was bursting with some portentous news. He contained himself through the meal where the talk was self-consciously nonpolitical and after dinner suggested that he and John retire to the office to discuss an important matter. He had come, Sewall told his friend when they were alone, at the behest of Governor Bernard. Bernard had summoned him a few days before and asked his advice in settling upon Sewall's successor as advocate general of the Court of Admiralty. Bernard had already solicited the opinions of a number of people, among them Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson, as to the person best qualified for the position. The conclusion, Sewall told John with obvious pleasure, was "that, in point of talents, integrity, reputation, and consequence at the bar, Mr. Adams was the best entitled to the office. . . ."

Unspoken but doubtless an element in the Governor's decision was Adams' ability as a controversialist, his reputation as a relative moderate, and the hope that by bestowing the office he might be detached from the Samuel Adams-James Otis faction. John was, of course, well aware of the implications of the offer. It was a tribute to his effectiveness as a politician, or perhaps even more to his ability as a lawyer. But he had no hesitation in replying. Though the office was "a sure introduction to the most profitable business in the Province," and a notable first step "in the ladder of royal favor and promotion," at the same time, it was a most vulnerable spot. To accept it in good faith would be to announce his apostasy from the patriot cause. It would soon fall to the court to enforce the objectionable Townshend duties, which must "excite a great fermentation in the country." Adams' prompt answer to his friend's proposition was "No."

"Why?" Sewall asked.

"You know, Jonathan, what my political principles are, the system I have adopted, and the connections and friendships I have formed as a consequence. The office would be incompatible with my settled convictions."

But that need not be a barrier, Sewall insisted. The Governor knew his political principles as well as any man. "He offered you the position because he believed you were the best qualified for it, and because he felt he could rely on your integrity for the proper discharge of your duties."

"That is certainly fair and generous enough of the Governor," Adams answered, "but the office would still lay me under restraints and obligations I could not submit to."

There was an uncomfortable pause as the friends looked at each other with more feeling than their words could express. Sewall had undoubtedly pressed the cause with the Governor. For him it was a last effort to retrieve his companion from a course which, Sewall felt, could lead only to disaster, to resistance to the Crown and finally proscription as a traitor. It was absurdly stiff-necked and excessively tender to make such an issue over the right of Parliament to tax the American colonies. Why boggle at the principle when what mattered was not whether the authority so exercised was constitutional or in harmony with some extreme and fine-spun interpretation of natural law but whether it was exercised with reasonable forbearance? Principle aside, it could not be argued that the taxes were, in themselves, excessive or that it was unfair to expect the colonies to contribute to their own defense and to the support of the royal officials charged with supervising their trade. Sewall was as much for freedom and constitutional rights as any man, but even enthusiastic patriots admitted that England was the best and fairest government in the world, or, for that matter, in all of history. What kind of recklessness and immoderacy was it that would tamper with such a happy and fortunate subordination? It was all well enough to talk about "taxation without representation" as leaving the colonies in the same position as the subjects of the autocratic French court but did anyone for a moment dare to deny that in fact, as distinguished from theory, the colonists were happy in their relation to the Mother Country? All this clamor of mobs led by pathologically suspicious and emotionally unstable leaders like Samuel Adams and James Otis, surely this was straining at gnats. If England became genuinely repressive and ruthless it would be time enough for riots and manifestoes, for dramatic proclamations about the rights of Englishmen. Was John prepared to contend seriously that a tax on tea or lead or paint put his dearest rights in jeopardy? Anyone familiar with the colonies knew how jealous and parsimonious their legislatures were. They might express a humble willingness to tax themselves for the benefit of the English Exchequer, but it did not take a seer to predict that they would be most halfhearted in compliance with a requisition, that they would plead poverty, procrastinate and delay beyond endurance, give grudgingly and only in part. Otis' own friends admitted he was half mad; he was followed by a mob which, like all mobs, was full of blind destructiveness and hatred of authority in whatever form it presented itself, by mobs and by discontented artisans and struggling small merchants who envied their successful rivals. Was this the kind of enterprise that Adams with his keen insight into human motivation and the course of history wished to ally himself with? Jonathan Sewall felt he was wrestling with the Devil for the soul of his friend. But all this was unspoken. What was said was a protest from Sewall: "Why are you so quick and sudden in your determination? You had better take it into consideration and give me an answer at some future day."

John had already thought it over. He had been thinking it over, in a sense, for the last six years. There would be no point in a delay. But Sewall was insistent. Adams must consider the office at least; turn it over in his mind and feel the attractions, its material rewards and its professional ones. Sewall knew of his friend's ambition to shine at the bar. Time might shake his resolution. Three weeks later Sewall was back for his answer—it was still the same unwavering no.[3]

IX

In Boston Adams' law practice grew rapidly. Every term of the Court of Quarter Sessions and of the Superior Court saw an increase in the number and importance of the cases he was engaged to argue. Yet he was still dissatisfied. At a meeting of the bar at the Boston Coffee House to admit three new attorneys, he took note, a little gloomily, of the fact that lawyers "swarm and multiply," and wondered if measures to limit their numbers might not be desirable. From these reflections he naturally progressed to an assessment of his own progress at the bar. The Governor's offer of the position of advocate general, conveyed through Sewall, was certainly an indication that his talents were recognized; but it was tainted, in Adams' view, by political considerations. Even more gratifying was a message from John Hancock requesting that Adams undertake the defense of the *Liberty* and its owner against the charge of smuggling. The prosecution was in the hands of Jonathan Sewall and this fact was an added challenge to John. Certainly there was no more important case in the whole colony. Hancock, if convicted, stood to lose three times the value of the cargo in fines. Moreover Hancock's position as a leader and the chief financier of the patriot cause, as well as the name of his ship, made him a symbol of colonial resistance to British oppression.

No efforts were spared to make the case of the Crown as strong as possible. Agents of the Attorney General scoured the town looking for witnesses. When one was found he was interrogated by Admiralty Judge Auchmuty in his chambers and Adams, as defense attorney, had no opportunity to cross-examine. Friends, relatives and neighbors of Hancock were summoned in turn, and the Crown even threatened to call his ancient aunt, the widow of his benefactor, to court.

Adams in developing his argument before the court maintained that it was impossible to prove that Hancock, or even his captain, knew of what he called "this frolic"—the smuggling of the casks of wine ashore at night. If it could not be proved that Hancock either "consented or knew of it," he asked, "how can he be liable to the penalty?" This was shaky ground, and Adams, well aware of it, hurried on to concentrate on the nature of the laws under which the action had been brought against his client. "A benign and beneficial law," he pointed out, should be interpreted liberally but a "rigorous and severe law" should receive "a strict and severe construction," that is to say, a narrow one. In other words, drawing on a well-established legal principle, the punishment should fit the crime. The smuggling of a few wine casks had cost the British government at the most a hundred pounds in duties. Forfeiture of a cargo worth ten thousand pounds as well as the sloop itself and the imposition of a thousand-pound fine on the ship's master as well as treble fine to the owners would, in his opinion, "be a great disproportion between the crime and punishment." It would be proportionately more severe than any of the statutes involving rape, robbery, murder, or treason. Beyond that, the court should not for a moment forget one of the most important aspects of the case—that is, "that it [the law] was made without our consent. My client Mr. Hancock never consented to it. He never voted for it himself, and he never voted for any man to make such a law for him. In this respect therefore the greatest consolation of any Englishman, suffering under any law, is torn from him. I mean the reflection that it is a law of his own making . . . indeed the consent of the subject to all laws is so clearly necessary that no man has yet been found hardy enough to deny it." Even those Englishmen who upheld the right of Parliament to tax Americans contended that the colonists were virtually represented in Commons. But this, Adams insisted, "is only deluding men with shadows instead of substances"; this is "constructive law," tenuous deductions from dubious principles, and most dangerous to the rights of free men, "for whenever we leave principles and clear positive laws and wander after constructions, one construction or consequence is piled upon another until we get an immense distance from fact and truth and nature, lost in the wild regions of imagination and possibility, where arbitrary power sits upon her frozen throne and governs with an iron scepter."

Equally dangerous to the rights of Englishmen was the judicial power vested in Admiralty Courts. "Thus, these extraordinary penalties and forfeitures are to be heard and tried—how? Not by a jury, not by the law of the land, but by the civil law and a single judge." Unlike the ancient barons who secured their rights against King John at Runnymede, the lords of present-day England had shown "that they are willing that the laws of England should be changed, at least with regard to all America, in the most tender point, the most fundamental principle," while Englishmen in old England still insist upon their traditional rights. "What," Adams asked the court, "shall we say of this distinction?" Is there not here "a brand of infamy, of degradation and disgrace fixed upon every American? Is he not degraded below the rank of an Englishman? Is it not directly a repeal of Magna Carta as far as America is concerned?"

Adams then quoted Lord Coke in defense of trial by jury, and went on to point out that civil law rules of evidence must apply instead of common law rules. Under civil law presumption or circumstance were inadmissible; only the testimony of two witnesses to the act itself could have weight. The Crown could only produce one, an individual named Merle, and against his testimony there were "the strongest legal exceptions." In brief the case should be tried by common law *or* civil law. Otherwise, there would be some rules of civil and some of common law and "the judge at his discretion shall choose out of each system such rules as please him and discard the rest." Woe, then, to the rights of the defendant.

Jonathan Sewall answered that the Admiralty Court was not a civil court in the sense maintained by Adams, and Auchmuty supported Sewall, stating that Parliament meant the statute to be tried under common law; Adams must therefore cease his efforts to impeach the character of the Crown's witness. With this point settled, the case became a long-drawn-out wrangle over the nature of the testimony, a "painful drudgery" to Adams, who was summoned almost daily throughout the winter of 1768–69 to the Court of Admiralty by the tolling of "the tyrannical bell that dongled me out of my house every morning." Delay and procrastination seemed endless. Auchmuty's own feelings were deeply divided. The latter was, after all, a citizen of Boston, holding a highly sensitive and potentially most unpopular office. A decision adverse to Hancock would arouse his adherents in an instant and bring them down on Auchmuty like a tribe of red Indians. To dismiss the case would expose him, almost as promptly, to the displeasure of the Crown and encourage present and potential smugglers by suggesting that the Court was powerless to enforce the parliamentary statutes. It was thus expedient to let the case drag on month after month until it was finally withdrawn by the Crown attorneys.[1]

In the spring of 1769 John Adams again crossed swords with the Lieutenant Governor in his role as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The case was a spectacular one that roused intense interest throughout the colony. As with almost every event of the time, it had strong political overtones. Adams was retained by four sailors who had been charged with murdering Lieutenant Henry Gibson Panton, an officer of His Majesty's frigate *Rose*. The politically explosive aspect of the case was that there was strong evidence that the sailors were being impressed and that in resisting impressment they had killed the officer.

The facts were readily enough established. Panton had intercepted the American brig *Pitt* out of Calais for Marblehead. He demanded that the crew be assembled with the apparent intention of impressing some of their number. A part of the crew hid in the hold. When Panton ordered them out they refused to come. He would pry them out. "Come on, ye dogs," the beleaguered sailors answered, "here we are." They had armed themselves with a harpoon, an ancient musket and a fishgig, and they announced they would die before they would yield to impressment. Panton stationed himself outside the men's stronghold and tried to persuade them to come out, but they cursed and swore at him. If he had any regard for his life, he would leave them alone. The musket was loaded with slugs and aimed at his head. Reinforcements were meantime on the way from the *Rose*. When they arrived Panton ordered them to break down the bulkhead. There was a desperate scuffle for the musket, which failed to fire. One of the sailors in the dim light drove the harpoon at Panton and caught him in the throat, severing the jugular vein. The marines carried the wounded officer to the captain's cabin and he died there a few moments later.

Adams had been engaged by Otis to act with him in defense of the sailors, but Otis was in one of his "unlucid intervals" and John could not even track him down to discuss the case. In consequence the whole burden fell on his shoulders. He had to argue the case before a special Court of Admiralty, provided for by parliamentary statute for the trial of piracy and murder on the high seas. The court was made up of two royal governors—Governor Bernard, and John's old classmate, John Wentworth, Governor of New Hampshire—Chief Justice Hutchinson, Judge of Admiralty Auchmuty, Commodore Hood, senior officer on the American waters, and "certain counselors from Massachusetts Bay, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, to the number of fifteen."

Adams labored hard over the men's pleas. He intended first to challenge the jurisdiction of the court and request a trial by jury and then, if these pleas were overruled, to base his defense on the illegality of impressment and the right of the sailors therefore to defend themselves. When the court met, in an atmosphere of barely restrained excitement, Adams presented and read his pleas, "setting forth charters, acts of Parliament, common law, and ancient usages." No counsel for the Crown undertook to answer him; instead Hutchinson jumped up to move that the court should adjourn to the council chamber. The other members of the court concurred "and away went their Excellencies, Honors, and learned Judges to secret conclave." Hours passed and the rumor circulated through the town that they had decided to allow a jury.

Next morning, however, when the court reassembled, Bernard, as its president, declared without explanation that the court indeed had proper jurisdiction over the case and would exercise it. Jonathan

Sewall, as Crown prosecutor, then stated the case for the state "in a very honorable manner"; witnesses were called, examined by Sewall and cross-examined by Adams. The testimony of American and British sailors agreed in all essential points. The issue then turned on the question, first, of whether Panton intended to impress the Americans and whether their resistance was based on determination to resist that impressment; and, second, whether impressment was illegal.

Sewall having made the Crown's case, it fell to Adams to open the formal defense of the accused. He was well prepared, armed with "all the authorities in the civil law, the law of nature and of nations, the common law, history, practice, and everything that could have any relation to the subject." Here was his chance to dazzle court and spectators with the range of his learning, the depth of his research and the cogency of his argument. "All my books were on the table before me," he wrote, "and I vainly felt as if I could shake the town and the world." He had reason for his confidence. In his arsenal was a secret weapon, a volume of the British *Statutes-at-Large*. He had, he was sure, the only set in Massachusetts. In the copy displayed prominently on the table before him, its spine turned toward the judges, was a law of Parliament of 6 Anne 37, forbidding impressment on any vessel in American waters.

When Adams rose to make his rebuttal the crowded audience was "still as midnight, in eager expectation." "May it please Your Excellencies and Your Honors," he began, "my defense of the prisoners is that the melancholy action for which they stand accused is justifiable homicide, and therefore no crime at all." He had hardly gotten into his argument when Hutchinson jumped up once more and moved that the court adjourn again to the council chamber; away Their Excellencies and Their Honors marched while the town again buzzed with rumors that the verdict of the court would be death for mutineers. As for John, his "glass bubble was burst . . . all the inflammable gas was escaped from my balloon"; his hour upon the great stage had been abruptly and inexplicably terminated, his rhetoric unspoken, his marvelous array of citations and precedents unused. He and Abigail had an anxious night and next morning at the convening of the court both John's and the spectators' faces betrayed apprehension of the verdict. The four accused sailors, pale and frightened, were ordered to the bar. Governor Bernard rose, cleared his throat, and solemnly announced the decision of the court: the defendants were not guilty; the killing of Lieutenant Panton was justifiable homicide in necessary self-defense. As Adams recalled the dramatic moment, Auchmuty "squealed out, 'The judgment of the court is unanimous,' and not another word was said."[2]

Pleased as he was at the verdict, Adams was not disposed to credit it to the judicial wisdom of the court, or of Hutchinson, its obvious leader. The members had obviously been afraid to return a verdict that would ratify the hated practice of impressment. Such a decision would have raised a storm in all New England and the colonies. Hutchinson had cut short Adams' argument because, seeing on the table the British *Statutes-at-Large,* he had divined his opponent's intention to cite the act forbidding impressment and wished to forestall him. It was to the interest of His Majesty's navy to avoid a contest over impressment until such time as the statute forbidding it could be repealed.

A lawyer's greatest chore was riding circuit. The three circuits covered the state—northeast as far as Falmouth, Maine, and then south to Plymouth. The roads were rutted and muddy, the inns uncomfortable and crowded, the food indifferent, and, above all, for Adams there was the pain of being away from Abigail and the children. He missed Nabby's quiet, gentle ways, and John Quincy's laughing ebullience, and, almost as badly, he missed his books, those tidy rows of substantial leather bindings that gave him so much instruction and consolation. Abigail wrote that young John Quincy had recovered from the colic and that Nabby rocked him to sleep with a lullaby of her own composition—"Come, Papa, come home to Brother Johnny." Sunday, she added, "seems a more lonesome day to me than any other when you are absent." It was the day on which, however busy the week had been, "you commonly afforded us your benign influence."[3]

Regardless of the discomfort and inconvenience, the circuits offered compensations. They provided an opportunity to visit old friends, college classmates and relatives, and, even more important, to make contact with patriot leaders in every part of the colony. The result was a mixture of business and pleasure, substantial fees and good talk, picturesque scenes and amusing local characters. Moreover, the circuits gave Adams an opportunity to extend his constant observation of the political attitudes of the hinterland. The names and attributes of friends of liberty were carefully noted, as well as those of the waverers and the Tories.

Despite his earlier views on taverns, John was pleased to find the spirit of liberty nowhere so high as among the tavern-keepers. They were usually figures of influence in their communities, many of them militia officers, excellent channels of communication, in a strategic position to spread the patriot story and muster support for the cause. At Rowley, John spent the night at Captain Jewitt's tavern and listened to the owner declare that he had rather the House should sit all year than give up an atom of right or privilege.

At Newington, New Hampshire, he stopped to see his father's brother, Joseph Adams, minister of the town, a hearty, alert old gentleman of eighty-one. It was seventeen years since John's last visit and he scarcely remembered the place. His cousins and cousins' children had grown up and departed, but his uncle gave him a cordial welcome and a "cheerful, agreeable dinner."

At York, Maine, Adams stayed at the inn of Paul Woodbridge, whose children entertained him with a young crow they had captured, a comic creature with an enormous head and bill and sprawling legs. Woodbridge, like Jewitt, was a high Son of Liberty who had on his tavern signboard, beneath a portrait of William Pitt, the words: "Entertainment for the Sons of Liberty." He filled John in on the political alignments of the township—those who supported the cause and those who opposed it. Much as he would like peace, he told Adams, "he would venture his own life and spend all he had in the world before he would give [liberty] up." "Thus," Adams wrote, "the spirit of liberty circulates through every minute artery of the Province."

At Woodbridge's he had to interrupt his political conversations to pursue his little mare into an adjacent field where she was feasting on a neighbor's grass. "My biographer," he noted, "will scarcely introduce my little mare and her adventures"; she and the young crow were "objects that will not interest posterity."[4]

Adams' meeting with David Sewall, his former classmate, was a warm and pleasant one, although Woodbridge had warned Adams that his friend was an adherent of the "prerogative side"—the Governor's party. The two men talked of their college days, of Harvard Hall riots, and the mock-heroic account of Tutor Flynt's journey from Cambridge to Portsmouth. Sewall rode on with Adams, Winthrop and Farnham to Wells where they visited Moses Hemmenway, minister of that parish and one of their close circle of college friends. Hemmenway, "very friendly, complaisant, and hospitable," urged John to visit him on the way back to Boston.

At Biddeford, Maine, the friends walked a quarter of a mile down the river to visit an old woman named Poke who was at least a hundred and ten years old, some said a hundred and fifteen. They found nobody at home but, peering in the window, they saw the ancient dame stretched out on a bed, "withered and wrinkled to a degree" that John had never before seen or imagined. As they craned to get a better view, the woman's daughter came over from a neighbor's house and let them in, announcing to her mother, "Here is a number of gentlemen come to see you."

"Gentlemen," the old woman said, "I am glad to see you. I want you to pray for me; my prayers, I fear, are not answered. I used to think my prayers were answered, but of late I think they are not. I have been praying so long for deliverance. Oh, living God, come in mercy! Lord Jesus, come in mercy!"[5] She told her visitors she had been born in Ireland near Derry and that she remembered the rein of Charles II and his brother James. Looking at the incredibly seamed and wrinkled face and listening to the cracked voice, John felt a stab of pity that the poor creature had lived so sadly long and that the death she prayed for was withheld from her.

The cases tried on circuit provided an absorbing résumé of small-town life—theft, assault, malicious libel, rape and bastardy mingled with civil cases of trespass, debt and land litigation. At Salem, Adams was lawyer for the defendant, John Harrington, in a bastardy case. Ann Jossilyne had accused Harrington of being the father of her child. Harrington, in defense, declared that she had entertained a number of men. For his part, he admitted, "I f——d once, but," he added, "I minded my pullbacks. I swear I did not get her with child."

A case of assault and battery involved two Salem clerks, Pitt and Gray. Gray had come into the store where Pitt worked, and when Pitt had demanded an apology for a fancied insult, Gray had answered, "I ask your pardon, you chuckle-headed son of a bitch!" Pitt struck a fighting stance, pushed Gray with one hand and then hit him with a knotty stick "as big as your thumb." Adams won acquittals for Harrington and Gray, then happily made his way back to Boston to rejoin Abigail and the children.

Back at the Brattle Street house the question that occupied much of John Adams' thought was what role he should play in the day-to-day political affairs of the colony. Samuel Adams and James Otis were committed to the program of factionalism. That is, they were leaders of the opposition. Whatever the Governor, or more broadly the executive branch of the government, did they invariably opposed. In the proverbial manner of politicians they searched the record to find issues on which they could score points against their opponents. They self-consciously built a political organization, disciplined, and responsive to their commands. Thus involved, they were inclined not to view issues on their merits but rather to calculate cold-bloodedly how they might best serve the purposes of partisanship. But this course, John decided, was not for him. Although both Otis and John's cousin urged him to take his turn with Dr. Joseph Warren and John Hancock in haranguing town meetings on the iniquity of the British colonial officials, Adams declined. He was determined to preserve that independence which he had so prized in Colonel John Quincy and his father. It was difficult enough to restrain his natural impetuousness. He had no intention of creating further hazards for himself by joining the ranks of the patriot faction. "I never would," he wrote a little self-righteously, "deceive the people, nor conceal from them any essential truth, nor especially make myself subservient to any of their crimes, follies or eccentricities."[6]

John was distressed at James Otis' increasingly wild and erratic behavior. One Sunday afternoon after evening meeting, John had dinner with

Otis, Samuel Adams and John Gill, editor of the Boston *Gazette,* the unofficial voice of the Sons of Liberty. After supper the three men assisted Gill in setting up the next day's paper. In the printer's shop, while the printer's devils set the type, their hands moving swiftly from the fonts to the matrices selecting the letters and dropping them into place with their tweezers, Samuel Adams and Otis assisted Gill in "cooking up paragraphs, articles, occurrences, etc., working the political engine," and Otis gave rein to his antic disposition. As John expressed it: "Otis talks all. He grows the most talkative man alive. No other gentleman in company can find a space to put in a word." Much of it was fascinating talk—informed, spirited, humorous; but much was tediously anecdotal and self-centered like the garrulity of an old man; and some was simple ranting—"bullying, bantering, reproaching and ridiculing." As Adams expressed it, a little primly, there was "no politeness nor delicacy, no learning nor ingenuity, no taste or sense in this kind of conversation." Otis also threatened to destroy the little club of which Adams was a member: "He talks so much," John wrote in the diary, "and takes up so much of our time, and fills it with trash, obsceneness, profaneness, nonsense and distraction, that we have no[ne] left for rational amusements or inquiries. . . . I never saw such an object of admiration, reverence, contempt, and compassion, all at once," he concluded. "I fear, I tremble, I mourn for the man and for his country; many others mourn over him, with tears in their eyes."[7]

He watched as his hero's foibles became eccentricities and the eccentricities madness, taking it as an object lesson; when Warren importuned him to address town meetings, John replied, "That way, madness lies," meaning the madness of Otis and the madness of mob violence.

Yet, if he would not stand forth as an active partisan, he would continue to observe, as sharply as his own wits and the guidance of his preceptors would permit him, the motivations of individuals and of groups. There was no sign that the crisis with England would soon be dissipated. Rather, there was every indication that common action in behalf of colonial liberties would be a continued necessity. Such action must be guided and directed, must be turned from meaningless violence to restrained and orderly protest; a feeling of solidarity must be created and a temper that would, if worst came to worst, dare the utmost. This spirit must be forged and the day of testing anticipated. On the fourth anniversary of the founding of the Sons of Liberty, three hundred and fifty Sons gathered at Robinson's Liberty Tree Tavern in Dorchester. Two large tables were laid in the open field beside a barn with an awning of sailcloth stretched overhead. A little "Tory" rain fell on the patriots but not enough to dampen their spirits. Philemon Dickinson, brother of the famous Philadelphia lawyer, John Dickinson, who had written an eloquent attack on the Townshend duties under the title of

"Letters of a Pennsylvania Farmer," was a guest of the Sons along with Joseph Reed of New Jersey.

After a dinner washed down with generous quantities of cider came the toasts. These were the central feature of patriotic festivals. They usually numbered forty-five in honor of the forty-fifth issue of the *North Briton,* the paper of John Wilkes, enemy of tyranny and advocate of the colonial cause. Forty-five gave the toastmaster a good deal to work with and considerably elevated the temper of the company. On this occasion as on most others, the toasts started with one to the King and then to the Queen, the Prince of Wales, Pitt, Conway, Barré and other "friends to colonial liberties," to John Wilkes himself, to the thirteen sister colonies, to Runnymede and Magna Carta, to trial by jury and the classic inventory of an Englishman's rights, and finally to "the speedy removal of all task-masters, and the redress of all grievances . . . the abolition of all craft and low cunning in Church and State," and, threateningly, "strong halters, firm blocks, and sharp axes, to such as deserve either," followed by the discharge of a small cannon and three loud, if ragged, cheers.

The toasts at such gatherings served as a kind of credal statement. They were educational (in case some lately recruited patriots were slightly muddled about the principles of liberty) and inspiring, and they served to fix in men's minds the main points at issue between the Mother Country and the colonies.

After the toasts there was other entertainment. John Balch, famous as a mimic, diverted the company with "The Lawyer's Head" and "The Hunting of a Bitch Fox." Then came the Liberty Song, written by John Dickinson and set to the tune of an old English drinking ballad:

Come, join hand in hand, brave Americans all,
And rouse your bold hearts at fair liberty's call.
No tyrannous acts shall suppress your just fame,
Or stain with dishonor America's name.

Then the chorus in which the whole company joined:

In freedom we're born and in freedom we'll live,
Our right arms are ready,
Steady, men, steady.
Not as slaves but as freemen, our lives we will give.

The Sons broke up, full of good liquor, good cheer, camaraderie and patriotic zeal, strengthened in their determination to resist all infringements of their rights, and John, thoroughly pleased with the day, wrote in his diary, "This is cultivating the sensations of freedom. . . . Otis and Adams are politic in promoting these festivals, for they tinge the minds of the people; they impregnate them with the sentiments of liberty. They render the people fond of their leaders in the cause, and averse and bitter against all opposers. To the honor of the Sons, I did not see one person intoxicated, or near it."[8]

In Boston, as in Braintree, the principal laboratory of politics was the town meeting. To unravel the forces and identify the persons who dominated Braintree politics was a relatively simple matter, but Boston's "springs of action" were far more intricate. To understand them it was necessary to understand factions and parties. These must first be identified, their limits marked out, their aims and ambitions observed, and points of vulnerability noted for future reference. There were parties in religion and government, of course, but also in manners and fashion. John noted that the practical politician must learn "the machines, arts, and channels by which intelligence and reports are circulated through the town"—what persons pass on rumors, information, current news, and how reliably; who are "the makers and spreaders of characters" —that is, those who help to make or break the reputations of rising young politicians. The student of politics must be informed of the economic condition of "the various tradesmen and mechanics, their views, designs and projects." He must be informed of the "state, hopes, views, plans, passions and sentiments" of those who are members of the Governor's party, and equally of the patriot group and those who maintained a precarious neutrality. It was important to know the characters and political inclinations of "all the clergymen of all denominations, physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, lawyers and merchants of eminence, and shopkeepers." John compiled a list of all the social and professional clubs of Boston and, as far as he was able, of their members; he canvassed "the state of diversions, amusements, spectacles, etc. . . . The buffoons, the merry andrews, the storytellers, the song singers, the mimics." Patriotic gatherings such as that at Dorchester needed entertainment. The Sons could not be counted on to forgather just to hear lengthy political harangues. Such occasions must be salted with "diversions" and "spectacles."

Only by systematic study could one discover "the wheels . . . cogs or pins, some of them dirty ones, which compose the machine and make it go." No one could tell, and most preferred not to consider, where resistance to King and Parliament might lead, but wherever it might carry them, the leaders of that resistance discerned clearly that they must master the machinery of politics and build a reliable and disciplined political organization if they were to have any hope of success in their fight.[9]

Below all the drama and excitement of the growing conflict with the Mother Country, John and Abigail endured their own domestic joys and tragedies. A third child and second daughter, christened Susanna Boylston, was born to Abigail after a difficult pregnancy at the end of 1768 while they were living at Brattle Square. The baby was ailing and sickly and Abigail with her migraine headaches and chronic insomnia had a difficult time of it. Susanna died when she was little more than a year old and the loss was so bitter to John that he could not bring himself to speak of it for many years. Yet four months after the infant's death Abigail bore a fourth child, a son named, simply enough, Charles. Thus in little more than five years, Abigail had given birth to four children and this single fact did much to shape their family life, dominated by successive pregnancies and demanding infants.

X

With the presence in Boston of the British soldiers, the crisis took on a more or less chronic character. There were almost daily incidents—a soldier cursed by a townsman, or hooted and jeered at; a citizen shouldered roughly aside by a soldier; a rock hurled or a stick thrown by a daring apprentice. Even when there were no incidents, there still remained the highly visible presence of the soldiers in their bright red coats, the sound of drums and fife that so disturbed the Adamses in Brattle Square, or the clomp of heavy boots on the cobblestone streets to remind Bostonians that theirs was an occupied city, to remind them of the power of Great Britain, and of Parliament's intention to make that power felt in the enforcement of its statutes.

Hope remained that the King himself would respond favorably to the colony's humble petitions to have the troops removed. But Pitt resigned, Shelburne was removed, and Townshend's death at the age of forty-one brought in Lord North, a man thoroughly in sympathy with the King's determination to bring the colonists into a proper subordination. Indeed, at the opening of Parliament, North referred to Boston as "in a state of disobedience to all law and government," and expressed his intention of bringing those "turbulent and seditious persons" to terms. Hillsborough sent word through one of the colonial agents that "Parliament will not suffer their authority to be trampled upon. We wish to avoid severities towards you; but if you refuse obedience to our laws the whole fleet and army of England shall enforce it."

When Parliament proceeded to debate upon the colonies, the members, despite an impassioned defense of the Americans by Edmund Burke, joined in declaring that the action of the Massachusetts Assembly in opposing the revenue acts was unconstitutional, that the circular letter was likewise unlawful and that the Boston convention was proof that Massachusetts was plotting to set up an authority independent of the Crown. Parliament went further and proposed to revive an obsolete statute of Henry VIII providing that the "chief instigators of the late disorders" might be transported to England "for trial and condign punishment." Again Burke, joined by Barré and the former Governor of Massachusetts Bay, Thomas Pownall, warned of the folly of such a draconian policy, but their warnings went unheeded. In the colony itself the General Court, prorogued the previous year for refusing to rescind the circular letter, was finally, in May 1769, called into session by the Governor. But if he had hoped to find the delegates in a more tractable mood, he was disappointed.

At the Boston town meeting in early May, John Adams was again a member of a committee to draft instructions to the town's delegates—Otis, Cushing, Samuel Adams and John Hancock. The General Court was to assemble in the Court House. Just opposite this building, the British troops had established a main guard post outside of which they placed two small cannon pointing at the chambers where the Assembly was to convene. To a citizenry abnormally sensitive to threats or intimidation, the implication seemed obvious. It was an advance warning to the delegates to be circumspect in their deliberations. At least this was the spirit in which John Adams and the Boston patriots interpreted it. The delegates were thus instructed to turn their attention to "the privilege of that Assembly of which you are now chosen to be members. The debates there must be free. You will therefore exert yourselves to remove everything that may carry the least appearance of an attempt to awe or intimidate." Common decency and the honor and dignity of a free legislative called for the removal of the offensive guards and cannon, "as well as that clamorous parade which has been daily around the Court House since the arrival of His Majesty's troops." Once the troops have been removed from the square, the delegates should proceed to "inquire into all the grievances we have suffered from the military power"; why the troops have been quartered in the town; and why the "repeated offenses and violences committed by the soldiery" against peace and good order have gone unpunished. Further, the delegates were to refuse to pay for the expenses of quartering the troops and "supplying them with necessaries" and do their best to have them removed entirely as an offense to a free people. The revenue bill was still a great affliction; second only to it was the extension of the powers of the Admiralty Courts. At this point Adams incorporated into the instructions a portion of his argument in the case of the sloop *Liberty* in which he had maintained that the Americans were being forced into the position of second-class citizens of Great Britain. In conclusion, the delegates were admonished to insist upon the right of the Assembly to petition "'humbly, dutifully and loyally' for redress of a general grievance."

Adams' instructions defined the temper of the General Court. Bernard had called them into session to take up the already overdue business of government, but the Assembly declined to do so until their petition to have the troops removed had been answered by the Governor. The latter, for his part, refused, saying he had no authority over the soldiers. After a fortnight of waiting for the Assembly to vote payment of his annual salary, which it stubbornly refused to do, Bernard adjourned the body to Cambridge and informed the delegates of his intention to leave at once for England in order to lay before His Majesty's ministers the intractable behavior of the Massachusetts Province. The answer of the General Court was a petition, passed unanimously, asking the King "to remove Sir Francis Bernard forever from this government."

There the matter rested. The Governor departed for England on July 31, leaving Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson in charge, and the city abandoned itself to noisy rejoicing. "The bells were rung, guns were fired from Mr. Hancock's wharf, Liberty Tree was covered with flags, and in the evening a great bonfire was made upon Fort Hill." Hutchinson tried once more to extract the supplies from the General Court and then, still unsuccessful, prorogued that body until January.

At the end of February 1770, Adams returned to Boston from a brief trip to Weymouth and came upon a great crowd of people collected in the snow and freezing cold near the Liberty Tree. When he inquired for the reason he was told that the previous day a crowd had attempted to proscribe the shop of a merchant, who refused to comply with the nonimportation agreements, by nailing a wooden figure on his door so that potential customers would avoid the store. Ebenezer Richardson, a friend and neighbor of the uncooperative merchant, had tried to intervene and drawn the wrath of the crowd on himself. Having been an informer on smugglers for the customs office, he was already an unpopular figure. The mob drove him into his own house and began to throw rocks and brickbats through his windows, even to batter at his door. As bolder spirits tried to force their way into the house, Richardson fired his musket blindly and killed a twelve-year-old German apprentice boy, Christopher Snider. The mob had borne Richardson off to hang him but cooler heads had prevailed and the terrified man had been committed to prison.

The patriots had taken the occasion of the boy's funeral to express the city's resentment against the measures of the British government. Some five hundred children had walked through the silent streets before the bier, six of young Snider's companions were pallbearers, and a crowd of Bostonian men and women followed in the funeral procession as it wound its way from the Libery Tree to the Town House and then up to the burying ground. Adams, after taking the chill of his ride out of his bones in a nearby house, joined the procession. Later, writing of the event in his diary, he suppressed his misgivings about the use to which the boy's death had been put. "My eyes never beheld such a funeral;

the procession extended further than can be well imagined," he wrote, and then added, "This shows there are many more lives to spend, if wanted, in the service of their country."

A few days after the funeral of the Snider boy there was a more serious episode. As two off-duty soldiers were passing Gray's ropewalk a workman abused them in colorful and explicit language. The soldiers gave as good as they got; then observing, as other workmen joined in, that they were outnumbered, they went off to round up some of their fellows and returned to challenge the ropemakers to a brawl. In the fracas that followed, rocks, clubs and the soldiers' cutlasses were enthusiastically employed before the owner of the ropewalk and passers-by were able to separate the combatants. Rumors immediately circulated through the town that the workmen and soldiers would renew their battle on a larger scale the following Monday, March 5.

Monday evening, after a tense and anxious day, gangs of town toughs and apprentice boys roamed the streets spoiling for a fight. There had been a light snow, but the air was mild and a new moon cast a wan light over the town. Wherever parties of "townies" encountered soldiers there were skirmishes. A band of soldiers passing from the main guard post opposite the Town House to the barracks on Brattle Street were intercepted by a group armed with clubs and sticks. There were cries of "Bloody lobsterbacks!" and "Kill the British boogers!"; the boldest pressed forward, aiming blows at the soldiers. Several redcoats leveled their firelocks at the crowd and threatened to blast a lane through them. At that moment an officer came up and ordered the soldiers into a nearby yard. For a moment the situation seemed saved, but someone rang the alarm bell and people from various quarters of the town began to converge on King Street. Baffled by the withdrawal of soldiers, the crowd gave tongue: "To the main guard! To the main guard! That's the nest!"

In little clots and bunches the mob swept by King Street, by Cornhill, through Wilson's Lane and on through Royal Exchange Lane to the lower side of the square. There in front of the custom-house the vanguard overran a soldier standing at his post. "There's the soldier who knocked me down," a boy exclaimed. "Kill him! Knock him down! The bloody brute!" The frightened soldier retreated up the custom-house steps, priming his firelock. "He's going to fire," someone cried. "If he does, he'll die for it," another voice called. "I don't care," the sentry answered, "if anyone touches me, I'll fire." His words were answered with a fusillade of snowballs and stones. The sentry leveled his musket at the crowd and called at the top of his voice for help from the main guard house, a few doors away; "Sergeant of the Guard, Post no. 1." The guard tumbled out with surprising speed, the sergeant accompanied by a file of seven men, to protect the sentry. The soldiers made their way through the press of people and took their positions in front of the beleaguered sentry. The order to prime and load rang out clearly over catcalls and halloos of the multitude. The officer of the day, Captain Thomas Preston, promptly joined his men and the little detachment faced a thoroughly aroused group of citizens. A huge Negro, Crispus Attucks, stood in the forefront and, joined by others alongside him, dared the soldiers to fire.

"You are cowardly rascals. Put down your guns; we are ready for you." One of the men swung a stick at the head of a soldier; another grabbed at a bayonet and tried to wrest the musket from the soldier's hands. A soldier was knocked to the ground. "Fire, fire, if you dare! Why don't you fire?" Suddenly, in the midst of the melee, a shot was fired; then, in ragged succession, six others. The crowd scattered in an instant, leaving three men dead on the trampled snow and eight others badly wounded. Among the dead men was Crispus Attucks, the mulatto giant who had taken a lead in baiting the soldiers. As the smoke drifted away Captain Preston formed his squad up, ordered them to reload and then marched them quickly to the guard house while the crowd returned to take off its dead and wounded.

At the guard house drums sounded the call to arms and several companies formed near the Town House. The bells in the Old South, King's Chapel, and the North meeting-houses began to ring; people poured from their houses until King Street was thronged. Rumors flew everywhere—the soldiers had charged a peaceful assembly and massacred a hundred men; the town militia were forming to attack the soldiers; Colonel James Otis had taken command.

Hutchinson, red-faced and out of breath, arrived at the guard house and fired questions rapidly at Preston. Had he ordered the soldiers to fire? What had provoked the action? Emissaries from the crowd found their way into the presence of the Lieutenant Governor. The people demanded to hear from him what action he intended to take. He must address them and give satisfaction or they would take matters into their own hands. Thus pressed, Hutchinson returned to the Town House, mounted to its balcony, and, when the great throng had grown quiet, spoke with power and persuasiveness. A terrible crisis had seized the city. More violence could only lead to a darker catastrophe. As for his own course, he would pledge his word that a thoroughgoing inquiry should be started in the morning and if the soldiers were found guilty they would be punished as the law directed. The law was the town's best resource. The crowd must disperse peaceably and leave justice to the civil courts of the Commonwealth. "The law should have its course," he concluded, "I will live and die by the law."

The speech, forthright and courageous, took some of the edge off his listeners' anger. Hutchinson retired to consult with his hastily assembled

Council and with the commander of the soldiers. The leaders of the crowd similarly conferred. Promises were well enough as sops to an aroused people but by morning Preston and the soldiers might be safely ensconced at Castle William or aboard a British frigate beyond the reach of the Sons of Liberty or the courts of law. There must be, they decided, some action this night. A message was thus sent to the Lieutenant Governor informing him that the crowd would not disperse until Captain Preston had been arrested. Acting again with promptness, Hutchinson ordered a court of inquiry to begin an on-the-spot examination of the unfortunate Captain, then persuaded the British officers to order their troops to barracks.

Appeased for the moment at least, the multitude began to drift away, leaving behind a handful to keep watch at the inquiry. The examination of Preston lasted three hours and resulted in his being bound over for trial and the soldiers likewise placed under civil arrest. What was left of the night saw little sleep in Boston.

Next morning the town was soon filled with men and women converging from the outlying communities. From Malden, Newton, Charlestown, Dorcester and Cambridge, they came to confirm the rumors that were already flying through the colony. The selectmen of the town were closeted with the Governor and Council. The Sons of Liberty arranged for an eleven o'clock meeting at Faneuil Hall, and when the selectmen came from their conference at the Town House, Thomas Cushing was chosen moderator of the meeting and the town proceeded to debate its course of action. Finally, it moved and agreed unanimously to dispatch a committee of fifteen, including Samuel Adams, Cushing and Hancock, to inform the Lieutenant Governor that nothing could restore peace but the removal of the soldiers. At this word the carefully preserved composure of the Lieutenant Governor finally showed signs of cracking. He was under almost unendurable pressure. Acting Governor in place of Bernard, a native Bostonian with long-standing friendships and loyalties in the community, Hutchinson was cruelly torn. Was he simply to give way at every point to the demands of the patriot extremists? What would the ministry think of his actions? Would he be pilloried for weakness and compliance? On the other hand, what if the citizens of Boston rose in arms against the soldiers—that would be revolution and the soldiers were heavily outnumbered. Exhausted by the terrors of the night, his face ashen with strain and anxiety, Hutchinson agreed to remove one of the two regiments.

A regular town meeting was convened at Faneuil Hall at three o'clock and, when that chamber overflowed, adjourned to the Old South where again the crowd spilled out into Cornhill Street. When the meeting had been brought to order, Samuel Adams read Hutchinson's concession, but the members would have none of it. "Both regiments or none!" was the cry. Another committee was appointed to inform the Lieutenant Governor that all the soldiers must go and at once. The committee departed on its mission and returned several hours later with the Lieutenant Governor's further concession: the troops would be removed to Castle William. The news was greeted with loud cheers, a military watch was organized, and the committee which had waited on Hutchinson was appointed a "committee of safety" to provide for the public defense.

John Adams had been meeting with his club at Henderson Inches' house in the South End of Boston when the company heard the alarm bells ringing. The group grabbed hats and cloaks and set out to assist in extinguishing the flames. On the street they were told that British soldiers had fired on a crowd of citizens, killing some and wounding others. John and his friends joined people hurrying toward the scene. In the square around the Town House there was a large crowd facing two field pieces with engineers and grenadiers drawn up in front of them. John's first thought was for Abigail. She was alone with the children and a maid. Things seemed quiet for the moment at the Town House and Adams decided to slip home and assure himself that all was well. Coming out of Boylston Alley into Brattle Square, he saw a company of soldiers, bayonets fixed and muskets shouldered, drawn up in the street. There was no passage through the narrow way except under the very noses of the soldiers and there John trod "without taking the least notice of them, or they of me, any more than if they had been marble statues."

He found Abigail over her first fright at the shots and cries and ringing of bells and the two of them discussed the implications of the latest and most serious crisis. This was the fruit of bitterness and hate, John pointed out. For months, Samuel Adams, Warren, Hancock, and, until his madness, Otis, had been fanning the fires of passion and prejudice among the more combustible elements in the populace. Now men had been killed and there would be the devil to pay. The people would demand the blood of the soldiers for the Boston blood spilled. But if the soldiers had simply acted in self-defense or under proper orders, they must be protected by the law. There were other facets. Would the farmers, notoriously hostile to Boston mobs, support the town? How would the other New England colonies react? Would New England be supported by the other colonies? The solidarity of the patriot cause throughout the English colonies might be shattered or seriously impaired by the events of the night. Adams knew very well that many patriots in other colonies looked on Boston as a turbulent and disorderly city, the behavior of whose citizens little comported with firm and dignified opposition to Parliament and the ministers of the Crown. Regardless of how Samuel Adams and his followers viewed the event, the cause would be soiled in the minds of many patriots, from Georgia to New Hampshire. A rabid and insolent mob, inflamed by its leaders, had invited the terrible chastisement which it received. There was one way that the bad impression produced in fair and impartial minds by the events of March 5 might be erased. If the soldiers were fairly tried, and, if innocent, acquitted, it would be apparent that Boston placed the law above prejudice and partisanship. The mob must then bear the guilt and the city stand exonerated before honest men. Who would best defend them and vindicate the Province and the law? These were the questions John and Abigail discussed until late at night and they troubled John's rest long after he had gone to bed.

Adams' law office was near the Town House stairs and next morning as he sat at his desk preparing a brief he was visited by a custom-house agent, one James Forrest, nicknamed the Irish Infant. The man was in a state approaching hysteria, weeping and distraught. He came from Captain Preston. He had already been over half the city looking for a lawyer to take Preston's case. None of them would risk his popularity and perhaps his safety by protecting the Captain from the vengeance of the patriot party. Josiah Quincy, the brilliant young son of Colonel Quincy and a fledging lawyer, had accepted conditionally on the acceptance of his in-law, John Adams. Adams was, therefore, the keystone in Preston's defense. "He says he will engage, if you will give him your assistance," the unhappy Forrest told Adams; "without it, he positively will not." Adams had no hesitation in replying. It was a cause that he could hardly have resisted. He could demonstrate most dramatically that he was an independent man; that law and justice stood higher with him than partisanship and political advantage. Every accused man, however heinous the crime he was charged with, had a right to counsel of his choice and a fair trial. He could not resist lecturing Forrest: the man must understand that this would be as important a case as had ever been "tried in any court or country of the world"; it was the duty of a lawyer to hold himself responsible not only to his country but to God, the ultimate source of all justice. Forrest or his principal Preston could, therefore, expect no tricks or artifice or prevarication from Adams. If, in Adams' opinion, his client was not guilty, he would do everything in his power to secure his acquittal, but no more than "fact, evidence, and law would justify."

"Captain Preston," Forrest answered, "requested and desired no more. . . . As God almighty is my judge, I believe him an innocent man."

"That must be ascertained by his trial," Adams replied, "and if he thinks he cannot have a fair trial of that issue without my assistance, he shall have it without hesitation."[1]

Forrest then gave Adams a guinea as a retainer to seal the agreement, and the matter was settled. After Forrest's departure, John was left to review his own feelings. He had taken a bold step, yet one for which he had not a moment's regret. His popularity with most of the patriot party in Boston—a popularity "very hardly earned"—would be sacrificed, at least until passions cooled. But, in compensation, his name would be known and his words read wherever English law was venerated and the world would learn that justice could be received in Boston.

When the word was spread about the city there was, as Adams anticipated, a revulsion of feeling against him. Since he was nourished, to a degree, by a sense of persecution, he noted the clamor with grim pleasure. Self-righteousness, to be fully enjoyed, needs a feeling of isolation, of lonely defiance. The greater the outcry, the more overwhelming the opposition, the greater sense of the righteousness.

John Adams knew himself well enough to make a careful audit of his motives and to recognize that, like all motives, they were not entirely pure. Yet, when all that had been said, the decision was based on his deep convictions about the nature of the law and his determination to be an independent man, and, as such, it was as admirable a decision as imperfect men are apt to make.

The trials of Captain Preston and the soldiers were postponed until the fall session of the Superior Court to allow time for the preparation of the defense and to permit the passions of the city mob to cool. When the Court called up the cases on September 7, the attention of the whole city focused on the court chamber in the Town House. For the great majority of Bostonians, the picture of the massacre had been fixed by Paul Revere's engraving of the scene. In Revere's representation, Preston, with his sword drawn, was giving the command to fire and the soldiers' muskets were blazing forth into an orderly and respectable crowd; at the same time, the wounded and dying lay on the street and one victim was being borne off to a nearby house to have his wounds treated. In the foreground, a doleful dog observed the scene. The engraving, carried the verse:

Should venal courts, the scandal of the land,
Snatch the relentless villain from her hand,
Keen execrations, on this plate inscribed,
Shall reach a judge who never can be bribed.

Revere's picture had been reinforced by the accounts of numerous eyewitnesses, uniformly unfavorable to the British soldiers, which had been printed in the Boston newspapers. The average citizen of Boston was, in consequence, convinced that without provocation the redcoats had fired in cold blood on Crispus Attucks and his fellows.

Only fragmentary notes on the trial of Captain Preston have been preserved. Quincy and Adams quickly established that in the confusion and excitement of the "massacre" it was impossible to determine whether Preston had given the order to fire. The evidence, to the contrary, was that one of the soldiers, goaded beyond endurance, had fired and the others had taken the report of the musket as the signal to let fly at their tormentors. The vast weight of the testimony exonerated the Captain, and the jury, after deliberating briefly, returned a verdict of not guilty.

With Preston freed, the attention of the city turned to the trial of the soldiers some three weeks later. Here certainly there must be some sacrificial victims. There was no question that shots had been fired or that the soldiers had fired them. No legal tricks or devices would confuse or obscure those simple facts. The newspapers renewed their clamor; those bloodthirsty redcoats must feel the wrath of an aroused and indignant people.

Robert Treat Paine and Samuel Quincy conducted the prosecution. John Adams, Josiah Quincy and Sampson Salter Blowers were the attorneys for the defense. The case was argued before Benjamin Lynde, Thomas Cushing, Peter Oliver and Edmund Trowbridge, justices of the Superior Court of Judicature. Most of the preparation and argument of the soldiers' case fell on Adams and young Josiah Quincy. Quincy was an engaging young man whose cross-eyes gave his face a curious piquancy, quizzical and slightly comic; a man so boyish, cheerful and unaffected that everyone loved him.

The first move of the attorneys for the defense was to exercise their pre-emptory challenges in the selection of the jury for the purpose of excluding every man on the jury panel who was from Boston or its immediate vicinity. The jurors so carefully chosen were country men who would be less apt to sympathize with the Boston mob or feel pressures to return a verdict of guilty. Thus winnowed, the twelve who took their places in the jury box were good, solid countrymen with respect for law and order bred into their bones. They listened solemnly while the clerk addressed them in the classic formula: "Good men and true, stand together and harken to your evidence."

The prosecution began by calling a string of witnesses and the general purport of their testimony was that the crowd was "standing orderly and making no outcry" when the soldiers came from the guard house "without any coats on, driving alone, swearing and cursing and damning like wild creatures, saying, 'By Jesus, let them come. Damn Yankee boogers, slay them all!'" Inoffensive citizens, strolling about to see the sights, had been fired upon by brutal soldiers.

After the prosecution witnesses had been cross-examined, Adams and Quincy produced witnesses of their own who gave a rather different version of the night's events. By the time they had all had their turn, it was apparent that the soldiers had been given ample provocation for their firing. In summary for the defense, Josiah Quincy spoke first: "Whether the soldiers were properly sent here, it is not our place to inquire; we are to consider the troops, not as instruments for advancing our cause," he reminded the jurors, "but as fellow citizens, who, being tried by a law extending to every individual, claim a part in its benefits, its privileges, its mercy." The jurors had a deep responsibility to the law itself, to the principles of justice. "We must not forget that we ourselves will have a reflective hour—an hour in which we shall view things through a different medium—when the pulse will no longer beat with the tumults of the day—when the conscious pang of having betrayed truth, justice and integrity shall bite like a serpent and sting like an adder. . . . If you are determined in opinion, it is vain to say more; but if you are zealous inquirers after truth, if you are willing to hear with impartiality, to examine and judge for yourselves—enough has been said to apprise you of those avenues at which the enemies of truth and justice are most likely to enter." It was Quincy's role to stir up the consciences of the jurors, to break down whatever prejudices they might have against the prisoners as instruments of British tyranny, and open them to the facts of the "massacre."

Adams followed and picked up the thread of Quincy's argument. "As the prisoners stand before you for their lives," he said to the jury, "it may be proper to recollect with what temper the law requires we should proceed. . . . We find in the rules laid down by the greatest English judges . . . we are to look upon it as more beneficial that many guilty persons should escape unpunished than one innocent person should suffer. The reason is because it is of more importance to the community that innocence should be protected than it is that guilt should be punished. . . .

"In the continual vicissitudes of human things, amidst the shocks of fortune and the whirls of passion that take place at certain critical seasons, even in the mildest governments, the people are liable to run into riots and tumults. There are church quakes and state quakes in the moral and political world, as well as earthquakes, storms and tempests in the physical. . . . We have been entertained with a great variety of names to avoid calling the persons who gathered at the custom-house a mob. Some have called them shavers, some call them geniuses. The plain English is, gentlemen, a motley rabble of saucy boys, Negroes and mulattoes, Irish teagues and outlandish jack tars. And why should we scruple to call such a set of people a mob? I cannot conceive, unless the name is too respectable for them. The sun is not about to stand still or go out, nor the rivers to dry up, because there was a mob in Boston on the fifth of March that attacked a party of soldiers. Such things are not new in the world, nor in the British dominions, though they are, comparatively, rarities and novelties in this town."

So much for the character of the crowd. What of the events themselves? In regard to the soldier Montgomery, the evidence was clear enough that he had been assaulted and knocked down before he rose and fired. How much was he supposed to bear before retaliating? "When the multitude was shouting and hazzaing, and threatening life, the bells ringing, the mob whistling, screaming and rending an Indian yell; the people from all quarters throwing every species of rubbish they could pick up in the street . . . Montgomery in particular smote with a club and knocked down, and as soon as he could rise and take up his firelock, another club from afar, struck his breast or shoulder . . . what could he do? You expect he should behave like a stoic philosopher, lost in apathy? Patient as Epictetus while his master was breaking his legs with a cudgel? It is impossible you should find him guilty of murder. You must suppose him divested of all human passions, if you don't think him at least provoked, thrown off his guard, and into the furor brevis, by such treatment as this."

Having painted for the jurors a vivid picture of the attack upon the soldiers and stripped away the protective covering of the tormentors by assigning them that bestial name, a mob, Adams ended by reminding the jury of their responsibility to the facts. "Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence. . . . To your candor and justice I submit the prisoners and their causes."

And then an eloquent peroration: "The law, in all vicissitudes of government, fluctuations of the passions, or flights of enthusiasm, will preserve a steady undeviating course; it will not bend to the uncertain wishes, imaginations and wanton tempers of men. . . . It does not enjoin that which pleases a weak, frail man, but without any regard to persons, commands that which is good and punishes evil in all, whether rich or poor, high or low—'tis deaf, inexorable, inflexible. On the one hand it is inexorable to the cries and lamentations of the prisoners; on the other it is deaf, deaf as an adder, to the clamors of the populace."[2]

The Crown closed its case, the judges gave their addresses and the jury retired. It eventually acquitted six of the soldiers and found two guilty of manslaughter. These pled "benefit of clergy," read from Scripture, were branded on their thumbs, and dismissed. Adams and Josiah Quincy followed the soldiers to the guard room. There the men crowded about them, some weeping openly, to express their gratitude. Rough, simple men, most of them little more than boys, they hardly understood the nature of the ordeal through which they had passed but they were convinced that they owed their lives to the two colonial attorneys who had defended them so ably.

For John Adams, the months immediately following the trial were far more difficult than those preceding it. The Boston *Gazette* took him severely to task and the arguments of the defense were attacked sharply in its pages by *Vindex*, the pen name of Adams' "brother," Samuel. For

Samuel Adams' purposes, a verdict of guilty would have been vastly more useful. It was not that Samuel was bloodthirsty. The Lieutenant Governor or the Crown would undoubtedly have pardoned the men if they had been sentenced to death, but the propaganda value would have been enormous. The acquittal of the soldiers was an indictment of the Bostonians who had provoked them to fire. If Montgomery and his fellows were guiltless, the citizens of Boston, the mob as John Adams had dared to call it, must be guilty. But John Adams was not concerned with what his cousin wanted; he was concerned, honestly, if a bit self-righteously, with justice, and he was satisfied that justice had been done. Under attack by the more extreme patriots, he took satisfaction in the reflection that the world and, above all, that final, implacable earthly judge, posterity, would celebrate his courage and his skill.

That Adams was inclined to exaggerate the martyrdom he must suffer for his decision to defend Preston and the soldiers was indicated by the Boston town meeting in the spring of 1770. Friends of Adams' put him up for the place of James Otis as a delegate to the General Court from the town of Boston; he was elected by a large majority. Otis was too far gone to perform the duties of a legislator. Although he had periods of lucidity, he was quite unpredictable.

When messengers from the meeting came to inform him of his election, John returned with them, and, after expressing briefly his sense of the hazardous character of the times, the importance of the trust and his own inadequacy, he accepted. The election was profound satisfaction to him. By it he stepped into the shoes of his hero, James Otis, and took his place on the great stage of provincial affairs. Yet, again, he could not forbear to dwell on the sacrifices that his duties demanded of him. He had one of the largest law practices in the colony, his health was "feeble"—indeed his diet of milk and toast was enough to make it so; he was just beginning, after years of scraping and pinching, to enjoy some of the comforts and refinements of life. In Adams' words, "I was throwing away as bright prospects [as] any man ever had before him" and devoting himself "to endless labor and anxiety if not to infamy and to death, and that for nothing, except what indeed was and ought to be all in all, a sense of duty."[3] In the evening when he came home, John poured out his anxieties to Abigail; she, exhausted by her pregnancy and full of apprehension for her husband and for the children, broke into tears. When she had regained her composure and dried her eyes she approved her husband's acceptance of election to the General Court. She would share gladly in whatever lay ahead and place her trust in God.

XI

When the General Court convened early in June of 1770, the delegates assembled in Cambridge at the order of the Lieutenant Governor. There, removed from the dangerous influence of the Boston mob, the members might deliberate more coolly. But it was not to be. The court resented being moved from its traditional quarters in the Town House to rural Cambridge. The House, accepting the newly elected members, ordered that "Mr. Hancock attend Mr. Adams to the gentlemen appointed to administer the oaths," and John went off with his Braintree friend to be sworn in and then formally take his seat. Two days later he was appointed with Samuel Adams to a committee charged with stating the Assembly's objections to doing business until they were returned to Boston. This was the first of a series of committees on which the two Adamses were to serve. So closely were their names associated by the end of the session that old Governor Shirley, living in retirement at Roxbury, upon hearing the names of the Boston representatives, was reported to have replied, "Mr. Cushing I know and Mr. Hancock [I] know . . . but where the devil this brace of Adamses came from, I know not."[1] The resolution of the Assembly not to do business until it was recalled from its Cambridge exile was rejected by the Lieutenant Governor and a war of nerves ensued. On the fourteenth of June a new committee, again including the "brace of Adamses," was appointed to draw up a request to the Lieutenant Governor to dismiss the House; the following day both were members of a committee sent to present the drafted message to Hutchinson.

The House then recessed for the Boston session and the spring circuit of the Superior Court, but the Suffolk sitting produced little business. The nonimportation agreement and the consequent "declension of trade" left merchants, tradesmen and lawyers in the doldrums. John turned again to keeping his diary, which had been neglected in the crowded days following the riot. On Wednesday morning, June 27, he noted: "Very fine—likely to be hot—at my office early. The only way to compose myself and collect my thoughts is to set down at my table, place my diary before me, and take my pen into my hand. This apparatus takes off my attention from other objects. Pen, ink and paper and a sitting posture are great helps to attention and thinking." The diary was a kind of solace; he took it up whenever his hours were his own—while he went on circuit with his fellow lawyers, when there were fresh experiences and pleasant social gatherings to record.

In the afternoon Adams picked up "my brother, Samuel Adams," in his new chaise and the two friends drove off into the country to enjoy the air, returned home and dined together. Their conversation, as it always did, ranged over a host of topics, and Samuel confessed to his cousin that he had never looked forward, planned or schemed, or tried to provide for the future. Like the grasshopper, he had lived from day to day, absorbed in the moment. John, on the other hand, had lived as the ant, laying by, planning out the steps of his career. Indeed, he was convinced that he "must have sunk into total contempt and obscurity, if not perished for want, if I had not planned for futurity." He had had to learn early "the art of living," he told Samuel, and it had cost him "much musing and pondering and anxiety."[2]

In July, at the end of the northern circuit, Hutchinson convened the General Court in Cambridge. The Assembly's first order of business was a request to return to the General Court's proper quarters in the Town House. John and Samuel were named to a committee to wait upon the Lieutenant Governor. Again the request was refused, this time at some length, and a committee was appointed to draft a reply to Hutchinson's message. The Lieutenant Governor's answer was to prorogue the House until the end of September.

When the General Court was called into session at the end of September, the Lieutenant Governor stood firm in his refusal to return the members to the city. Yet again, a committee containing the two Adamses was appointed to prepare a reply. Another exchange followed. The House found the Lieutenant Governor's answer unsatisfactory and once more the Adamses were instructed to draft an answer. At this point the delegates realized that they had no choice but to accept Hutchinson's orders or set up an extralegal assembly which would be, in effect, a revolutionary junta. The moderates in the General Court were unwilling to take the latter course. When the defiant answer composed by the committee was referred to the House it was voted down 59 to 29, and the delegates proceeded, at long last, to business.

As the year 1770 drew to a close Adams made the usual audit of his progress in his profession and in the larger sphere of provincial politics. He had undertaken the defense of Captain Preston and the soldiers and secured their acquittal on the charge of murder; he had been elected one of the "Boston seat" in the Great and General Court and had played a leading role in the deliberations of that body; despite his attention to the business of the Assembly, he had seen an encouraging growth not so much in the volume as in the quality of his law practice. He secured more and more important clients and larger fees. In the contest to which he had committed himself between the Mother Country and the colony, the year had been more or less a standoff. In April Parliament, feeling the pressure from London merchants whose trade had been seriously affected by the nonimportation agreements, repealed all of the Townshend duties except that on tea, which was retained lest the colonies assume that Parliament was abandoning its claim of authority to tax the colonies. With the duties repealed, nonimportation was dropped and trade quickly revived, although good patriots continued to boycott English tea. (Adams wrote in his diary: "Dined at Mr. Hancock's, with the members, Warren, Church, Cooper, etc. . . . and spent the whole afternoon, and drank green tea, from Holland, I hope, but don't know.")[8] Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson, after a struggle of almost six months with the General Court, had prevailed upon it to accept Cambridge as its home, at least for the moment.

Moreover in September Hutchinson, on order from England, had turned over Castle William to the British military commander, Lieutenant Colonel William Dalrymple, placing the colony thereby under martial law. The Assembly had responded by appointing a day of fasting and humiliation to call public attention to this latest instance of British tyranny.

The early months of 1771 were clouded for John by Abigail's bad health. He began suddenly to feel the weight of his public and private duties and his own health, undermined by anxiety about Abigail, was imperiled. He missed Braintree and the countryside thereabouts more than he cared to admit. In addition, the milk diet which he stubbornly adhered to did him little good. He began to suffer from pains in his chest and a rattling, racking cough which depleted his energy and left him tired and nervous. His thoughts ran constantly on his "horses, oxen, cows, swines, walls, fences, etc." After consultation with Abigail, he decided to uproot the family and return to the farm, keeping an office in the city. On the thirteenth of April, John drove Abigail and the children back to Braintree to their modest farmhouse. The family seemed crowded after the more spacious Boston quarters, but John, like Antaeus, gained strength when he touched his native earth. He hurried off like a boy out of school to mount Penn's Hill and ride the wooded ridge of the Blue Hills. Boston he put behind him with a kind word. In the three years there he had "received innumerable civilities from many of the inhabitants;

many expressions of their good will both of a public and private nature. . . . I wish to God it was in my power to serve them, as much as it is in my inclination. But it is not. My wishes are impotent, my endeavors fruitless and ineffectual to them and ruinous to myself."

Ailing and inadequate to his tasks, he must seek the retirement of a pastoral life. "I . . . shall divide my time," he wrote, with the earnestness of a reforming drunkard, "between law and husbandry. Farewell politics." Yet once back in Braintree the life he led hardly suggested that of a convalescent in delicate health. He rose at six, journeyed into Boston, and attended to his practice at his office until nine at night, only taking time out to run over to Samuel's house for breakfast, dinner and tea. On Monday, April 15, just two days after the move to Braintree, he worked at his office until two in the afternoon, took the ferry to Cambridge to attend a session of the Assembly, returned to his office after dinner and passed the evening in blessed quietness, writing and reading. He spent the night in his office, attended the Assembly again the next day at Cambridge, returned to Boston in the evening and then pressed on to Braintree—"still, calm, happy Braintree." The following morning he toured his farm to see what the hired hands had accomplished in his absence; then with Abigail he rode over to Weymouth to hear the young Reverend Mr. Blake's fast-day sermon.[4]

"Up to Braintree, down to Boston"—John Adams had become a suburban commuter, and his resolution to be free of politics lasted hardly as long as the drunkard's pledge, for Sunday afternoon after meeting he left his family behind and traveled into the city. At "S. Adams's" he found the Warren brothers, doctor and colonel, together with, to his great surprise and pleasure, James Otis—"steady and social and sober as ever, and more so." Another day and he was off on the spring circuit to Worcester where he dined with his mentor, Lawyer James Putnam, and with his sometime rival, Robert Treat Paine. A week later he was back in Braintree, "at my little retreat," exhausted from his travels and his labors. But next morning he was up at first light to take his constitutional up Penn's Hill. There he traced out the springs and swamps; with some cleaning and ditching on the north side he could make a series of waterfalls and grottoes. He came home to one of Abigail's hearty breakfasts, spent the morning drafting a brief, and set off in the afternoon to inspect the western Common Lands of the town. They presented a scene of picturesque desolation. The tumbled rocks and verdant trees, "the rushing torrent, the purling stream, the gurgling rivulet, the dark thicket" were old friends. The walnuts, the pines and oaks which he had pruned himself years before had grown tall and clean-limbed. His boyhood came back in a rush of poignant memories and forgotten dreams.[5]

He stood now in a new relation to the town. He had acted out the classic American saga of the small-town boy who had made good and who returned with his laurels fresh upon his head. He noticed that the townspeople, his friends and neighbors, looked at him respectfully and spoke to him with a new tone in their voices. This was very pleasant, but there was a sweeter triumph. Captain Ebenezer Thayer, who not many years before had lacerated John by calling him in Major Crosby's court "a petty lawyer," was now mild as milk, referring to him as the first lawyer in the Province. The Captain went on to assure Adams that if he wished to be put up for representative to the General Court from Braintree, he, Thayer, would willingly withdraw in his favor; finally he asked if eminent Lawyer Adams would take his son Elisha as a clerk. John allowed himself only a fleeting pleasure, and then brought himself up sharply with the reminder that it was after all "a wretched triumph, a poor victory, a small antagonist to defeat." Perhaps the generosity was in Thayer, who offered Adams a homage untainted by vanity or self-interest, the ungrudging respect of a smaller man for a greater.[6]

But there was bitter with the sweet, a thorn among the roses. Samuel Adams was running for the office of Registrar of Deeds for Suffolk County against Ezekiel Goldthwait, a Braintree man, and John busied himself in a little local electioneering for his cousin. When the votes were tallied, it appeared that "S. Adams" was overwhelmingly defeated. In addition to that sting, Adams had to listen to Goldthwait crow like a cock on a dunghill, scoff at John's electioneering efforts, and threaten to run against him for representative to the General Court. He carried to his diary some bitter reflections on the fickleness of the people. If there was a man in the Province who had a clear claim on the gratitude of the voters it was Samuel Adams, yet he had been rebuffed in favor of a political unknown, while John, who had risked almost as much in the patriot cause, had reaped "nothing but insult, ridicule, and contempt for it." He had sacrificed health and leisure to serve the people well and now they served him and his cousin shabbily. He would take the lesson to heart. Henceforth, let the people look to their affairs as he would to his: "I have learned wisdom by experience. I shall certainly become more retired and cautious. I shall certainly mind my own farm, and my own office," he wrote.[7]

But he did not know himself as well as he professed. For a thin-skinned man—and in comparison Samuel had a political hide like a rhinoceros'—he had chosen a bruising avocation. Politics was something he could neither take nor leave alone. It was in his blood, however piously and sincerely he might speak of his service to the people, and he could not get it out no matter how many times he might swear off, sign the pledge and promise Abigail to reform. Fortunately, it was in

Abigail's blood too. She shared the chronic inebriation, and thus she was tolerant of John's declarations of reform, relapses and fresh avowals. They were to go on a long time together drinking deeply of the same cup of politics, excoriating its bitterness, proscribing it a brew for fools.

The defeat of Samuel Adams, as John came to realize, had broader implications. The citizens of Massachusetts were fed up with wrangles and disputes. The Boston seat had overplayed its hand by pushing too hard on the issue of the Assembly's removal to Cambridge. The other delegates, to be sure, had been content to let these more forceful and aggressive representatives—the two Adamses and Hancock prominent among them—dominate the sessions, but once they had been defeated, the country members from the small towns of the interior were glad to be rid of them. They were weary of the perpetual talk of liberty and the rights of Englishmen which some suspected were more designed to promote the careers of certain patriots than to win redress of legitimate grievances. They wished to be left alone, to return to the even, uneventful course of their lives as shrewd and cautious legislators and prudent husbandmen. After all, Parliament, giving evidence of a conciliatory temper, had repealed the stamp tax and Townshend duties (except for that on tea). Suddenly, the Boston patriots seemed like contentious, belligerent men, intent on stirring up trouble and keeping the Province in an uproar. Who cared whether the General Court met at Cambridge rather than Boston? The image of that city as an iniquitous place, never far from the mind of the provincial farmer, began to grow more vivid. A small coterie of Boston malcontents, some people were heard to say (and few undertook to gainsay them), had kept the whole colony in hot water and given Massachusetts a bad name throughout the continent.

It is a natural human quality to tire of constant alarms and to mistake a lull in the storm for the breaking of fair weather. Men like Samuel Adams, the Warrens, Joseph Hawley, and John himself were well aware of the dangers of such an attitude. It might lead to a softening of the spirit of liberty, a general relaxation and a gradual acceptance of minor infringements until nothing but the empty shell of colonial liberty was left. Samuel used the changed temper to support his argument that the public must be kept to the mark by manufactured incidents if genuine ones were lacking. It was, after all, for their own good and it could be held that the manufactured incidents were simply dramatic representations of real dangers and abuses. What if patriots grew fat and slothful and careless of their rights? Where would John's high-minded rectitude be then? The Boston Adams was often impatient of the Braintree Adams' stiff posture of integrity. It was easy enough to maintain, and along with it a rather abraiding feeling of superiority, if Samuel and his toughs were there to do the dirty work, which, however one might disapprove, must still be done by somebody if the cause was not to languish.

As rapidly as the patriot cause waned, that of the royal government waxed. Hutchinson's commission to replace the absent Bernard arrived and there was a spontaneous outpouring of affection and respect for the new governor. A convention of ministers in the county of Hampshire sent an address of confidence and solicitude, the county of Amesbury another, and many towns followed suit. All this was gall to John, who was coldly unforgiving, stonily irreconcilable. "If this wretched journal should ever be read by my own family let them know," he wrote in his diary, "that there was upon the scene of action with Mr. Hutchinson, one determined enemy to those principles and that political system to which alone he owes his own and his family's late advancement." It was at Hutchinson's door that Adams placed the blame of the "perpetual discontent and uneasiness between Britain and the colonies." Caesar had destroyed the Roman republic and made himself dictator; Hutchinson, by "countenancing and supporting" a system of corruption and tyranny, had won the office of governor and now was sustained by "the mad idolatry of the people."[8]

The low state of the patriot cause was underlined by a sharp dispute between Hancock and Samuel Adams. Even James Otis, apparently recovered, and sitting in the seat that Adams had vacated on his return to Braintree, declared that opposition to the Governor had gone far enough, that the Governor had a perfect right to move the General Court to Cambridge; it was time for a reconciliation and an end to wrangling. This from Otis! Would such a "melodious harmony" be lasting? John felt quite alone in the political world, except for his cousin Samuel. He could not, or would not, see Thomas Hutchinson as an able and well-intentioned man doing his best, under difficult circumstances, to discharge the duties of his office. Objectivity did not go so far. For him the Governor was a sycophant, placing his relatives in the principal offices of the Province, scheming to destroy the last vestiges of the patriot faction and deliver the colony bound hand and foot to the ministers of the Crown.

"Is it not a pity," he wrote in the diary, "that a brace of so obscure a breed [he and Samuel] should be the only ones to defend the household, when the generous mastiffs and best-blooded hounds are all hushed to silence by the bones and crumbs that are thrown to them, and even Cerberus himself [Otis] is bought off with a sop. . . . Their Maker has given them nerves that are delicate, and of consequence their feelings are exquisite, and their constitutions tender, and their health, especially one of them, very infirm. But, as a compensation for this," he concluded self-righteously, "he has been pleased to bestow upon them spirits that are unconquerable by all the art and all the power of Governor Hutchinson and his political creators and creatures on both sides of the Atlantic."[9]

To Abigail's uncle, Isaac Smith, he wrote, "I see that my countrymen, the Americans, have not the virtue, the fortitude, the magnanimity, to resist these encroachments . . . to a decisive effect." England could certainly not be counted on to cease its efforts to subordinate the colonies. Mother Country and colonies would thus proceed along divergent paths until "an entire alienation of affection and a total opposition of interests shall take place—and war and desolation shall close the melancholy prospect." Out of such a conflict "glory and powers and wonder may arise to carry on the designs of Providence. But I restrain perhaps a visionary, enthusiastic pen—you and I shall be saints in Heaven, I hope, before the times we dream of."[10]

On the circuit of the northern district—Salem, Ipswich, Newbury, Portsmouth, York, Kittery and Falmouth—he took the pulse of the country and found it weak. Foster Hutchinson, brother of the Governor, had been appointed associate justice of the Superior Court, a lucrative post because of its fees. The Governor's friends were busy everywhere, and at Kittery Adams' old friend, Colonel Sparhawk, chivvied him over the docility of the General Court. "Now you are come away they are become peaceable. You kept up a shocking clamor while you was there. . . . They say there is some private pique between the Governor and you." The tone was bantering but Adams felt an edge of malice in it. In his present listless and disheartened mood, he endured such jibes without return. The circuit itself was a "moping, melancholy journey" with neither "business, nor amusement, nor conversation." He found some brief diversion collecting pieces of cedar and making a backgammon table with Jonathan Sewall and John Lowell; while they played, he read *Don Quixote*.

Back in Boston, Adams argued a case against two agents in the custom-house for taking greater fees than the laws of the Province allowed. Here, at least, he had the courtroom audience with him. Whatever the attitude might be toward the Governor, customs officials retained the undiminished hostility of the citizens of Boston. When John won the case, compliments poured in from all sides. A friend told him that he had heard a man leaving the courtroom declare, "Mr. Adams has been making the finest speech I ever heard in my life. He's equal to the greatest orator that ever spoke in Greece or Rome." After recording this encomium in the diary, John added, "What an advantage it is to have the passions, prejudices and interests of the whole audience in a man's favor! These will convert plain common sense into profound wisdom, nay, wretched doggerel into sublime heroics."

The languishing of the patriot cause brought Adams to a personal crisis. He had cast his lot irrevocably with opposition to the Crown. He had spurned public office and taken his place beside his cousin, sharing his views if rejecting his methods of agitation. He had no doubts about the rightness and rectitude of his position and no regrets that he had taken it so boldly; nonetheless, the turn in the tide represented a severe setback for him. He saw former allies cozened with sinecures and political plums of various kinds, and the people, always fickle, singing the Governor's praises. A mood of black depression settled on him, a mood that even Abigail with all her tenderness and sympathy could not penetrate. The depression expressed itself, typically, in physical ills and complaints. He could not collect his wits to read, or think, or draft a legal brief; he was obsessed by a sense of futility and defeat, and full of aches and pains—his back, his chest, his head. He would die, he reflected despairingly, and leave Abigail to provide for three young children.

The latest fashion for valetudinarians was the mineral springs in Stafford, Connecticut; John, with Abigail's urging, decided to spend a few days there taking the waters. Passing through Worcester on his way to Stafford, he stopped off for a leisurely visit with his old friends. He lodged with Putnam and the next day the two men rode over Putnam's farm and beyond to Bogachoag Hill. Riding up the lane to the shop of the old heretic Doolittle, John noticed many changes. The population of the town had spread outward and "many shady thickets and gloomy grottos" where the young Adams had sat for hours "to ruminate and listen to the falls of water" were gone. Again, as at Braintree, he felt an intense pleasure at this return to scenes of his youth.

He visited Dr. Nahum Willard and his wife, who seemed little changed in fifteen years. Colonel Chandler was still lively and talkative although ailing and he and John compared symptoms and remedies. The Colonel envied John his visit to the springs. "If you find more health than you need," he said, "I beg you save me a little."

Chandler confirmed John's observation of the changed temper of the people. No one had been concerned about the late elections of councilors by the General Court. He himself was disgusted with Boston. The town needed stricter regulation and better order. "I hate 'em from my soul. . . . Great patriots! Were for nonimportation while their old rags lasted, and as soon as they were sold at enormous prices, they were for importing." As for tea, "those who were most strenuous against it are the only persons who have any to sell."

At meeting on Sunday, John saw dozens of familiar faces, among them a number of students to whom he had taught Latin and arithmetic. They were doctors and lawyers now—the Chandler boys, Thaddeus Maccarty, Jr., and little Billy Paine, grown into Dr. Paine.

From Worcester Adams rode on toward Stafford, pensive and lonely. His only diversion was at the taverns along the way where he stopped to eat and "oat" his horse. Here he observed the country people, noting in his diary their colloquial speech and small concerns, their origins and their political attitudes. Stafford Springs was at the foot of a steep hill amid a cluster of rocks. The water was clear and limpid, the rocks and sand at the bottom of the spring stained brown by its mineral content. The healing fluid poured out of a wooden trough. Mrs. Child, the proprietress, produced a broken glass mug, painted together, from which John drank plentifully. It had a faint and not unpleasant metallic taste. Below the spring was a little pond with a wooden shed built over it in which the ailing visitors washed and bathed at eightpence a time. John took two turns and withdrew to a nearby inn.

Each day he repeated the ritual: "Rode to the spring, drank and plunged," he noted in his diary. Thirty people had been there that day—"the halt, the lame, the vapory, hypochondriac, scrofulous." Then back to the pleasant inn with a wide prospect of mountain and valley stretched out before it, to read, rest and talk with his fellow lodgers, or spend the afternoon riding through the pleasant countryside. His chief pleasure was people. He was delighted with an eccentric Dr. McKinstry of Taunton who lodged at the inn and entertained Adams with his pretensions to learning. He was a student of the prophecies and when John, over tea, remarked that five hundred years hence there would be in America a great number of empires "independent of Europe and of each other," the Doctor replied, "Oh, I have no idea that the world will stand so long—not half five hundred years. The world is to conform to the Jewish calculations: every seventh day was to be a day of rest, every seventh year was to be a jubilee, and the seventh thousand years will be a thousand years of rest and jubilee; no wars, no fightings, and there is but about two hundred and thirty wanting to complete the six thousand years. Till that time, there will be more furious wars than ever." John was delighted with the doctrine and the doctor. "Thus," he wrote, "I find I shall have in the doctor a fund of entertainment."

Everywhere, as he rode about the country between visits to the spring, John encountered fellow Harvard men and remarked on "how many of my contemporaries at college, worthy men, live in poor and low circumstances! Few of them have so much of this world's goods as have fallen even to my share, though some of them have much more." Then a self-improving conclusion: "Let me enjoy, then, what I have, and be grateful." It was plain that the waters, however faithfully John gulped them down, were less therapeutic than his constant excursions to nearby towns, his rides into the mountains, especially to Chestnut Hill from whose summit he could see the Connecticut River and many of the towns along its banks.

Riding to Enfield, he dined at Pease's tavern where the landlord in his neat wig and ruffles pleased him; Pease, he discovered, was the great man of the town, its representative in the Assembly and oracle on political matters. Then on to Somers, Suffield, Windsor, Hartford and Wethersfield, noting the character of the people, the quality of the soil, the trade and produce. The interval land along the river dazzled him with its verdure; to pass through it was like "riding through paradise," surely the finest ride in America, the river flats "loaded with rich, noble crops of grass and grain and corn. . . . I wish Connecticut River flowed through Braintree," he wrote, and then loyally added, "but the barren, rocky mountains of Braintree . . . please me more." At the widow Griswold's inn in Wethersfield, John sat down to a table with an old woman, a maid, and an odoriferous carpenter with a long, greasy gray beard. "These republicans are not very decent or neat," he noted distastefully.

At Dame Shaler's tavern in Middletown, John began the Sabbath by feasting on the landlady's "finest and sweetest of wheat bread, and butter as yellow as gold, and fine radishes, very good tea and sugar." Forgetting his diet for the moment, he stuffed himself with the good food. But amid such pleasant scenes his conscience troubled him. The sensualist and the man of conscience warred within him. He assured himself that he was tired of "this idle, romantic jaunt. . . . I shall not suddenly take such a ramble again merely for my health. I want to see my wife, my children, my farm, my horse, oxen, cows, walls, fences, workmen, office, books and clerks. I want to hear the news and politics of the day. . . . I feel guilty—I feel as if I ought not to saunter and loiter and trifle away this time—I feel as if I ought to be employed for the benefit of my fellow men in some way or other." He was startled to find, moreover, that the Superior Court met a week earlier than he had thought. He must set off next day for Braintree. At the meeting-house he tumbled into the first pew he could find and there heard "a pretty sensible Yalensian Connecticuttensian preacher"—that is to say, a thoroughly orthodox one. After dinner John returned for the afternoon meeting which featured singing, the finest that he had ever heard, by lads and and lasses accompanied by instrumental music. The "sweetness and sprightliness" of the performance "absolutely charmed me," he wrote.

Monday morning he set out for home but the return trip was a desolate one. He started by getting lost and then was successively baked by the sun and chilled by cold rains. But he suffered most from want of companionship. It was ironic that one who, in general, took such a dim view of human nature should be so dependent upon genial social intercourse, and John was not unconscious of the irony. "Man is a social creature," he wrote, "and his passions, his feelings, his imaginations are contagious." In the absence of good company he had had "a naked, barren journey. My brains have been as barren the whole time as a sandy plain or a gravelly knoll. My soul has been starved." Even so he returned to Braintree in better health and spirits than when he left it. As much as such therapy could repair a state of mind, his trip to Connecticut had proved worth while. Still, lifting the excited, shouting children in his arms, he felt as though he had been gone a long time and he was grateful to be home.[11]

The Adamses had been in Braintree sixteen months when John made the decision to move back to Boston. His health was somewhat better (Abigail had given birth to a third son, Thomas Boylston); he hoped that he had learned by retirement and reflection how to live in the city: "temperance, exercise, and peace of mind" were the keys, especially the latter. Above all things he must avoid "politics, political clubs, town meetings, General Court, etc., etc., etc."—again the pledge, the vow of political chastity. It was the disorder of life that he most abhorred. There must be order and system, study, law, and the comforting circle of his family. These must make up his world. Yet, despite all such good resolutions, soon after his return to Boston, a friend dropped into his office and the two were soon engrossed in politics—"the grandest, the noblest, the most useful and important science in the whole circle."[12] A few days later he strolled down to the South End and had some conversation with his old friends, the Sons of Liberty Tom Crafts, the painter, and George Trott, jeweler. He found them much cooled in their ardor for liberty, complaining a little querulously that they were now called Tories. Such was the change since the high days of the Stamp Act, eight years before. The demoralization in the patriot ranks was underlined for Adams by the news that John Hancock, whose lawyer he had been in the still unsettled case of the sloop *Liberty*, had given a major part of his business to Samuel Quincy, John's adversary in the trial of the British soldiers. Even word that a party of Rhode Islanders had boarded a grounded revenue cutter by force and burned it to the water's edge failed to stir Boston's sluggish temper.

In the city, though Adams' health was better, his spirits flagged. As his thirty-seventh birthday approached, he calculated that more than half a normal life span had run out with little to show for it. "What an atom, an animalcule I am! The remainder of my days I shall rather decline in sense, spirit, and activity. My season for acquiring knowledge is past. And yet I have my own and my children's fortunes to make. My boyish habits and airs are not yet worn off."[13]

His feeling of anxiety and futility was increased by an episode that occurred soon after he returned to Boston. Adams was at the print shop of Edes and Gill, talking with Paul Revere, when James Otis came in, "his eyes fishy and fiery, looking and acting as wildly as ever he did."

"You, Mr. Edes, you, John Gill, and you, Paul Revere," he snapped, "can you stand there three minutes?"

"Yes."

"Well, do. Brother Adams, go along with me."

Otis led Adams to a room upstairs, locked the door in a conspiratorial manner, pocketed the key and quizzed John on a proposed challenge to the Superior Court. He then passed to an involved story about Hancock, unlocked the door, and escorted Adams down to the print shop. The talk among the five men turned to military matters, and Otis said to John, "You will never learn military exercises."

"Aye, why not?" John asked, a little startled to be touched on a secret aspiration.

"That you have a head for it, needs no commentary, but not a heart."

"Aye, how do you know? You never searched my heart."

"Yes, I have—tired with one year's service, dancing from Boston to Braintree, and from Braintree to Boston, moping about the streets of this town as hipped as Father Flynt at ninety, and seemingly regardless of everything but to get money enough to carry you smoothly through this world."[14]

Otis was not himself and John knew it, but the words cut him to the very bone, nonetheless. He tried to exorcise them by ungenerous reflections on Otis, by impugning the motives of the man he had admired above all others. The bitter words, as he wrote them, were the measure of his own hurt.

At the end of the year Samuel Adams with a friend called on John to request him to make an oration on March 5, the anniversary of the "Massacre," which Samuel and the Warrens were trying to establish as a yearly memorial day. They came as representatives of the standing committee of the town of Boston. The committee had unanimously settled upon him as the best man to do honor to the occasion. It was an odd request, John thought, to a man who had helped to free the soldiers and indict the Boston mob and he told them so. His position was bound to be an ambiguous one, open to general misunderstanding. In addition, he was too infirm, and too old; he had resolved to give up politics for good. His visitors urged him to wait and reconsider. No, his mind was made up and that was the end of it. They must go back empty-handed.

The next evening, however, he dined with Samuel Adams in the latter's newly painted and papered house and "had much conversation about the state of affairs"; the following night at Richard Cranch's he realized that he had not entirely shaken off his "constitutional or habitual infirmities"—politics. An Englishman in the company reprobated the action of the burners of the *Gaspee* and John discovered in himself "the old warmth, heat, violence, acrimony, bitterness, sharpness of . . . temper and expression. . . ." "I said," he wrote morosely in his diary that night, "there was no more justice left in Britain than there was in hell—that I wished for war, and that the whole Bourbon family was upon the back of Great Britain—avowed a thorough disaffection to that country—wished that anything might happen to them . . . that they might be brought to reason or to ruin."

He was dismayed at his "rash, inexperienced, boyish, raw and awkward" outburst. A man who had no better command of his tongue and his temper was "unfit for everything but children's play and the company of boys." Without self-control, he would never rise very high in the world: "Such flights of passion, such starts of imagination, though they may strike a few of the fiery and inconsiderate," he wrote, "yet they lower, they sink a man with the wise. They expose him to danger, as well as familiarity, contempt, and ridicule."[15] He had hardly a greater share of self-government than sixteen years ago when, as a callow young schoolmaster, he blurted out his dogmatic opinions before the Chandlers and Willards in Worcester. The solemn resolves to self-control seemed as ephemeral as the abjurations of politics.

XII

THE YEAR 1773 opened with John Adams in an "easy, composed and contented" mood. "I never was happier in my whole life," he wrote, "than I have been since I returned to Boston." He was determined to devote himself to the pleasures of private life, to study and to business and to his family. "Peace, be still, my once anxious heart. A head full of schemes and a heart full of anxiety are incompatible with any degree of happiness." Relieved of strain and tension, his health improved greatly and he anticipated a "happy and prosperous year," taking the precaution to remind himself, however, that fire, disease and death might bring all his hopes and prospects to ruin.[1]

The new year started off auspiciously with an evening spent in the company of a congenial group of patriots. John's friend Samuel Pemberton carried him off to the house of an entertaining bachelor, Jeremiah Wheelwright, where the two encountered a little group that included Thomas Cushing, Joseph Warren and Samuel Swift. It was an indication of the relaxed political atmosphere that the friends could rally each other about their defections from the cause. Adams called Cushing a pendulum, swinging from right to left, and Warren quoted Pemberton's description of Adams as "the proudest and cunningest fellow he ever knew," which was not entirely gall. The company in turn teased Pemberton on his failure to get a judgeship which had gone to the Governor's son and which they accused him of trying to get for himself, by trimming in his principles. Adams, still smarting from Otis' strictures, could not refrain from challenging the company to call him a trimmer. Warren, aware of his friend's short fuse, contented himself with calling John a "cautious man" who, when he spoke, spoke his true sentiments. "This was a little soothing to my proud heart," Adams noted in his diary.[2]

January had not run out before Adams was drawn once more into the web of politics. Governor Hutchinson, emboldened by the decline of the patriot cause and his own apparent popularity, gave a lengthy speech at the beginning of the winter session of the General Court in which he undertook to justify the supremacy of Parliament over the colonies, "in all cases whatsoever," and most specifically in its right to tax without restraint or limitation. It was a lecture, patient, laborious, learned, and, in the Governor's view, conclusive. A large part of the audience to whom it was addressed considered it inadmissible and specious in the extreme. The House appointed a committee composed of, among others, Joseph Warren, Samuel Adams and Major Hawley to frame a reply. Hawley, the member from Northampton, was a key man in the Assembly. One of the few country delegates who ranked with the "Boston seat"—that is, with Otis, the Warrens, Cushing and Hancock—he carried with him a critical number of the town representatives who were inherently suspicious of Boston and all its ways. This gave him a power second only to that of Samuel Adams himself; indeed, where Hawley stood fast, the Boston leader was forced to give ground. During John Adams' term in the Assembly, Hawley had come to respect the aggressive and forthright little lawyer, so when the House committee met to consider the reply to the Governor, Hawley insisted that Adams be called in for consultation. The draft before the committee, framed presumably by Samuel Adams and Joseph Warren, was couched in terms of man's natural rights and liberties. To the Governor's elaborately fashioned constitutional brief, the authors of the draft had replied with eloquent but vague appeals to abstract principles of human rights. Hawley, himself a lawyer, was dissatisfied with the reply; John was summoned and sat in on the committee's deliberations. As the members went through the document, paragraph by paragraph, Adams urged the elision of "the popular and eloquent periods" and the substitution of legal and historical arguments. The Governor had chosen the weapons, he should be met and defeated on his own grounds. Again Adams had a secret weapon for the conflict. He introduced into the reply quotations from an authority which no one in the colony had ever read—Moore's *Reports,* which he had borrowed from his patron, Jeremiah Gridley, and never returned. When the reply was published, Adams was delighted at the discomfiture that this strike produced in the Governor's camp, where no one dared dispute the citation, wriggle as they might to evade it.

That the year 1773 was not to be a year of peaceful retirement it would hardly have taken a soothsayer to predict. Hutchinson's speech to the General Court was accompanied by a dispute over the independence of the judiciary, and for the first time in three years Adams entered the lists to engage in a newspaper controversy on the subject. In neighboring Rhode Island a court of inquiry into the burning of the *Gaspee* served to dramatize the persistent issues between the colonies and the ministers of the Crown, and the towns of Massachusetts were drawn closer together by the development of committees of correspondence in each community, an invention of Samuel Adams. Through this channel passed a constant flow of information, of exhortation, of suggestions for common action.

When the anniversary of the Boston Massacre came round in March, Benjamin Church, the libertine patriot, gave the oration at the Old South meeting-house, packed in every pew, seat, aisle and gallery. The verdict of the jury was in accord with the evidence. Church conceded that a mob of troublemakers had provoked the soldiers to retaliation. But the essential point was that the soldiers had no business in Boston. The people of Boston were justified in calling the outcome of the riot a massacre and commemorating the "fatal night." By such means would they be reminded of the hostility of Great Britain toward colonial rights.

The hard core of patriots were conscious that they must destroy the popularity of the Governor because that popularity could very well be the cloak under the cover of which further infringements might be made on American liberties. Hutchinson's inexpedient lecture to the General Court on the authority of Parliament was cut to their order. By assuming the role of apologist for the parliamentary cause, he seemed literally to invite patriot attack. Perhaps his speech was a measure of his contempt for the low condition of the opposition. Whatever the Governor's motives, his address to the House had certainly been a strategic error. The patriots at once took hope and began working assiduously to undermine his standing with the "people at large." An unexpected bonanza was a packet of personal letters, most of them from Hutchinson and Oliver to friends in England. They had been sent by Benjamin Franklin, agent of the colony, to Thomas Cushing with the strictest injunctions to secrecy and with the avowed purpose of informing the Bostonians of the ways in which Hutchinson and his party were working to undermine the colony. Cushing, realizing the explosive nature of the correspondence, conferred with the junto of patriots, John Adams among them. It was Adams' opinion that no public use should be made of the letters because of Franklin's instructions that they were not to be published or any portion of them copied. The letters expressed the concern of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor over the mobbing spirit of the Bostonians and accused them specifically of seeking to throw off the authority of the Mother Country. Having seen them, Adams, when he visited Braintree, could not resist telling Abigail's uncle, Norton Quincy, and Mr. Wibird about the treacherous epistles. "Bone of our bone, born and educated among us," Hutchinson had, in the purloined letters, revealed himself as a "vile serpent." The Hutchinson-Oliver letters were shortly leaked to the newspapers and the Sons of Liberty took advantage of the popular resentment they aroused to petition the King to remove Hutchinson and Oliver from their offices.[3]

From whatever combination of circumstances, John Adams by May had abandoned his determination to remain aloof from politics, a determination which, as we have seen, he had adhered to fitfully. Friends prevailed upon him to allow himself to be nominated for a seat on the Governor's Council. The councilors were elected by the House from among its own members. Adams had therefore to run for the Assembly in order to be eligible for the Council. He faced the general election at the end of May with his usual misgivings. His prognostication was a gloomy one. He was not optimistic about the resolution of the patriots, and, for himself, he faced the prospect of office with apprehension. "What will be expected of me? What will be required of me? . . . What duties to my God, my King, my country, my family, my friends, myself? . . . What snares and temptations will be thrown in my way? What self-denials and mortifications shall I be obliged to bear?"

If elected, he was resolved to "act a fearless, intrepid, undaunted part at all hazards." On the other hand if he failed of election or was negatived by the Governor he would happily devote his attention to his family and to the preservation of his health. But, important as his health was, it involved a concern with self and he never overlooked an occasion to recollect that he had not been "sent into this world to spend my days in sports, diversions and pleasures. . . . Continual attention will do great things. Frugality of time is the greatest art as well as virtue. This economy will produce knowledge as well as wealth."[4]

Adams was elected to the Assembly and chosen by that body as a member of the Governor's Council, but rejected by Hutchinson for "the very conspicuous part Mr. Adams had taken in opposition." The diary contains no record of his reaction. Joseph Hawley, who had refused to run again from Northampton on the grounds of poor health, wrote to him for news of the activities of the lower house. He added a plea to Adams to use his influence to see that nothing was done "through strife or vainglory." Careful discussion and thorough consideration should precede any action, "in other words that we look before we leap."

Meantime a tempest was brewing in a teapot. The duty on tea had cut down greatly on its consumption in the colonies and as a consequence on its importation. The East India Company, with a mountain of tea on its hands, applied to Parliament for relief in the form of permission to export tea to the colonies without paying the customary duty in England. This would mean tea so cheap that even with the threepence-a-pound import duty that must be paid in the colonies, the devotion of the patriots would be put to a severe test. Parliament acquiesced and the

Company promptly made plans to dispatch shiploads of tea to American consignees in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Charleston.

The mistake of the Stamp Act was about to be repeated, though with even less premeditation than had accompanied the passage of that ill-fated statute. The word of the prospective arrival of the tea, with its bald appeal to cupidity and defiance of principle, its insulting assumption that pennies were more important than principles, rekindled the fires that the Stamp Act had ignited eight years earlier. In this agitation, the merchants who had imported tea before the Townshend Act took the lead but there was a ready response everywhere. If the popular reaction was not as strong or spontaneous as it had been at the time of the Stamp Act, it was still lively enough to be highly gratifying to the rapidly reviving Sons of Liberty. Here was an issue that affected every colony and every colonist who drank tea. It offered, once more, a single dramatic focus for the general discontent and uneasiness that many colonists felt about the designs of Parliament toward His Majesty's American subjects. It was one thing, as the Sons of Liberty had discovered to their sorrow, to raise up a militant spirit over a single symbolic issue, a matter of principle clear and simple enough to appeal to the understanding of any honest farmer or artisan. It was quite another to carry on month after month an effective, popularly supported resistance to gradual encroachments on colonial rights. Who paid the salaries of judges or of the Governor, or where the General Court met, while in some ways more serious constitutional issues than a particular tax on tea or painters' colors, were not causes for which the average citizen was prepared to mount the barricades. The Governor's lecture to the Assembly and the stolen letters had helped to arouse public opinion but the furor created by them must soon die down, and, in any event, affected only Massachusetts.

Once again Parliament played into the hands of the colonial leaders. To bring a heterogeneous, widely scattered group of colonies without a tradition of common action, or even a strong sense of mutual dependence, colonies that were in a number of instances suspicious, jealous or even downright hostile toward each other, to the point of common action required more than an ordinary amount of mismanagement and insensitivity, but the ministers of the Crown proved equal to the challenge. What on the British side was merely indifference, complacency and, as a by-product, a certain moral obtuseness became, after it had crossed three thousand miles of ocean, a blind, willful and, ultimately despotic disregard of those basic legal and constitutional rights that all Englishmen claimed as their birthright. So the tea was a godsend to patriot leaders. Even before it arrived they were busy preparing a reception. On November 3 the Boston *Gazette* contained a notice addressed "to the freemen of this and neighboring towns," summoning them to a meeting at the Liberty Tree to hear the consignees publicly resign their commissions and swear that they would reship any tea consigned to them straight back to London. The bells of the town began ringing at eleven o'clock and the town crier cried up the meeting through the city. The response was not as widespread as the promoters of the gathering had hoped. But some five hundred people turned out and when the consignees failed to appear a committee was appointed to wait on them and, if they were adamant, to declare them enemies of their country.

When the consignees refused, a legal town meeting was called, John Hancock elected moderator, eight resolves adopted, and the consignees again called on to resign; they again refused and the town meeting adjourned. There the matter rested for some three weeks until the *Dartmouth,* Captain Hall commanding, appeared in Boston Harbor with a hundred and fourteen chests of tea. The people of Boston and the surrounding towns were summoned to a meeting at Faneuil Hall the next day and broadsides were printed by Edes and Gill proclaiming: "Friends! Brethren! Countrymen! That worst of plagues, the detested TEA . . . is now arrived in this harbor. The hour of destruction, or manly opposition to the machinations of tyranny, stares you in the face. Every friend to his country, to himself and posterity, is now called upon to meet at Faneuil Hall at nine o'clock THIS DAY . . . to make a united and successful resistance to this last, worst, and most destructive measure of administration."

Faneuil overflowed and the crowd poured up Cornhill and King Street to the Old South; it was the largest meeting, some said, that Boston had ever seen. Samuel Adams resolved, and the meeting unanimously agreed, that the tea should be returned at once with the duty unpaid. On Tuesday morning when the meeting was reconvened to hear the replies of the unhappy consignees, the sheriff of Suffolk County appeared with a proclamation from the Governor which declared the meeting to be unlawful and ordered the crowd forthwith to disperse. When the Sheriff had finished reading the Governor's proclamation, it was answered with howls and hisses, and the meeting voted unanimously not to adjourn. A young artist, John Singleton Copley, the son-in-law of one of the consignees, stepped forward with an offer to act as mediator between the consignees, safely ensconced at Castle William, and the Boston meeting. His effort at mediation was judged "not in the least degree satisfactory," and after more than an hour of angry declarations and overheated oratory, the owner of the vessel and its captain agreed that the tea should be returned without touching land. Similar promises were extracted from the owners of two other tea ships that were expected daily. Armed patrols were appointed by the Committee for Public Safety and dispatch riders stood by to warn neighboring towns if any effort was made to land the tea. Several days later the other tea ships, the *Eleanor* and the *Beaver*, arrived and were moored near the *Dartmouth*.

Hutchinson, for his part, was determined that the tea should be landed. The guns at the Castle were loaded and Admiral Montagu, responding to the Governor's appeal, sent two warships to block the passage from the harbor. As the ships failed to depart, the town of Boston buzzed like a great hive. The mounting tension in the city was almost palpable.

Abigail, sharing the general anxiety, wrote to Mercy Otis Warren, wife of the Colonel, "The tea, that baneful weed, is arrived. Great and I hope effectual opposition has been made to the landing of it . . . the proceedings of our citizens have been united, spirited and firm. The flame is kindled and like lightning it catches from soul to soul. Great will be the devastation if not timely quenched or allayed by some more lenient measures." If the people of the colony are made desperate, "many, very many of our heroes will spend their lives in the cause." Her heart, she confessed to her friend, "beats at every whistle I hear and I dare not openly express half my fears."[5]

There was a succession of meetings and caucuses. Clearances for the *Dartmouth* were applied for at the custom-house and there both the collector and the comptroller "unequivocally and finally" refused to issue the vessel a clearance until her cargo was unloaded.

Word went out at once through the Sons of Liberty, calling the citizens of Boston and its environs to meet again at the Old South. Rotch, the owner of the vessel, appeared and told the assemblage that clearance had been denied. He was then ordered to make a personal appeal to the Governor, who had removed to his country estate at Milton Hill. In the interval between his departure and return, the crowd at the Old South grew and grew until, by three o'clock in the afternoon, it was estimated at seven thousand, by far the largest gathering in the town's history. Samuel Adams, Josiah Quincy and John Rowe kept the huge gathering diverted with oratory as the early winter twilight darkened the streets and the cold sea air penetrated to the bone. Rowe brought a shout of approval when he asked, "Who knows how tea will mingle with salt water?" Candles were lit and flared feebly in the cavernous interior of the meeting-house.

At six o'clock Rotch made his way through the packed aisles with word that the Governor had turned down his request for clearance. As soon as he had made his announcement to the hushed and expectant crowd, Samuel Adams stepped upon the pulpit behind him and said in a loud, clear voice, "This meeting can do nothing more to save the country." As though on cue a war whoop answered him from the porch and a band of Indians dashed past the windows of the meeting-house, down Milk Street to Griffin's wharf. The Indians, followed by their white allies, moved with a speed and assurance that testified to careful rehearsals. Lookouts were posted at the wharf and for three hours the Indians worked quietly and swiftly. The large chests were hoisted onto the decks of the ships and then dropped overboard into the dark water, bobbing about and drifting off slowly with the tide. Many people stood on the wharf while others watched from Belcher's Lane and from Cows Lane on the hill above.

Adams had been at Plymouth Court during the week preceding the Tea Party but he arrived back in Boston the morning after the dramatic event. When he had heard Abigail's excited account, he turned to the diary for the first time in months, writing in a spirit of fierce exultation: "Last night three cargoes of Bohea tea were emptied into the sea. This morning a man-of-war sails. This is the most magnificent movement of all! There is a dignity, a majesty, a sublimity, in this last effort of the patriots that I greatly admire. The people should never rise without doing something to be remembered—something notable and striking. This destruction of the tea is so bold, so daring, so firm, intrepid and inflexible, and it must have so important consequences, and so lasting, that I can't but consider it as an epoch in history!"

Whose inspiration it had been to dress the marauders as Indians was not recorded but it was clearly a touch of genius. It invested what might otherwise have seemed mere vandalism or riot with a symbolic and classical American quality. As Adams wrote James Warren, the Rubicon had been crossed and the bridges burned. Yet this was after all an attack on property. Property, for the Englishman, was almost more sacred than life. "Another similar exertion of popular power," he continued, "may produce the destruction of lives. Many persons wish that as many dead carcasses were floating in the harbor as there are chests of tea." What measures would the King, his ministers and Parliament take? "Will they resent it? Will they dare to resent it? Will they punish us? How? By quartering troops upon us?—by annulling our charter?—by laying on more duties? By restraining our trade? By sacrifice of individuals, or how?"

The real question was whether the destruction of the tea was "absolutely and indispensably" necessary. If that question could be answered in the affirmative, the colony could meet whatever measures England might take with resolution and a clear conscience. Adams was convinced that every reasonable effort had been made to avoid destroying it. To have let it be landed would have been to concede the principle of taxation by parliamentary authority, a principle against which the colonies had been struggling for a decade. It would be, in Adams' words, "losing all our labor for ten years, and subjecting ourselves and our posterity forever to Egyptian taskmasters; to burthens, indignities, to ignominy, reproach and contempt, to desolation and oppression, to poverty and servitude."[6]

Certainly all Bostonians did not share Adams' enthusiasm. Daniel Leonard expressed a typical Tory point of view when he declared the Tea Party "a more unaccountable frenzy, and more disgraceful to the annals of America, than that of the witchcraft."

The following noon Deacon Palmer and Abigail's uncle, Isaac Smith, dined with the Adamses. After dinner Joseph Trumbull came in and the Tea Party was the sole subject of conversation. The word was about that the Tories were as critical of the Governor for his actions as the Whigs. In their view, Hutchinson should have placed the tea ships under the protection of the troops at the Castle or the British naval vessels. He seemed to have been defying the Bostonians to touch the tea. Certainly there had been rumors enough of plans to dump it. Had the Governor deliberately set a trap and baited it with tea in the hope that Great Britain would discipline Massachusetts so severely as to end once and for all its rant of liberty and constitutional rights?

In England the reaction to the news of the Tea Party was unexpectedly strong. The King, addressing Parliament in early March 1774, accused the "colonies of trying to harass British commerce and subvert the Constitution. We must master them or totally leave them to themselves and treat them as aliens," he declared. Nothing but swift and condign punishment could check Boston's unruly and licentious spirit. As Lord North presented it, the matter was simple enough—either the colonies were colonies of Great Britain or they were not. One newspaper denounced the party as "the most wanton and unprovoked insult offered to the civil power that is recorded in history." A writer in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* declared, "I would rather all the Hamilcars and all the Hannibals that Boston ever bred; all the Hancocks, and all the sad-Cocks, and sad dogs of Massachusetts Bay; all the heroes of tar and feathers, and the champions, maimers of unpatriotic horses, mares and mules, were led up to the altar, or to the Liberty Tree, there to be exalted and rewarded according to their merit or demerit, than that Britain should disgrace herself by receding from her just authority."[7]

In the parliamentary debates one choleric member declared, "The offense of the Americans is flagitious. The town of Boston ought to be knocked down about their ears and destroyed. . . . You will never meet with proper obedience to the laws of this country until you have destroyed that nest of locusts."[8] So it was decided to make an example of Massachusetts. That imprudent colony should suffer so grievously that its sister provinces would see at once the futility of resistance to the Crown of Great Britain.

Lord North's first measure was a bill to close the harbor of Boston to all trade. It made Marblehead the colony's port of entry and Salem the seat of its government. Despite the opposition of Edmund Burke, Colonel Barré and Thomas Pownall, the bill passed by a large majority and the North ministry proceeded to push the Regulation Acts through both houses. The Regulation Acts took from the General Court the right of choosing councilors and declared it to be the right of the King through the royal Governor. The Superior Court judges were likewise to hold office at the pleasure of the King and the Inferior Court judges could be removed by the Governor. The sheriffs were to be appointed and removed by the executive. Town meetings were abolished, except for the election of officers.

Lord George Germain waxed especially eloquent on this latter point. In Germain's view, North could not do "a better thing than to put an end to their town meetings. I would not have men of a mercantile cast every day collecting themselves together and debating about political matters," he declared. The actions of the Bostonians were "the proceedings of a tumultuous and riotous rabble, who ought, if they have the least prudence, to follow their mercantile employments, and not trouble themselves with politics and government which they do not understand."[9] So well did the British understand their American cousins.

The Regulation Act further provided that officials of the colony and soldiers stationed there who were charged with capital offenses could be tried in England or Nova Scotia, and that troops might be quartered upon the town.

While these measures were in the making, John Adams, as a lawyer, was most concerned with the administration of justice in the colony. An earlier statute which had secured the judges a salary from the Crown rather than the General Court was considered by the patriots as a most dangerous blow against the independence of the judiciary. It was, moreover, unconstitutional since the colony's charter provided that the judges should be paid by the Assembly. This provision had been abrogated by the Crown without due process of law, without proceeding through the courts against the specific provisions of the charter. If the judges insisted on serving under the new arrangement it occurred to Adams that the only possible recourse would be for the Assembly to institute impeachment proceedings against them. This was an extreme and drastic step and Adams felt some dismay as he considered its implications. The judges of the Superior Court were able men, three of them his personal friends and all "very respectable and virtuous characters." To incite the people against them would be to expose men "who wore the robes and bore the sacred characters of judges" to mob violence. What would be the effect on the popular mind of thus bringing the custodians of the law into disrepute? "The poor people themselves," he reflected, once inflamed "by secret maneuvers," were "seldom aware of the purposes for which they are set in motion: or of the consequences which may happen to themselves: and when once heated and in full career, they can neither manage themselves, nor be regulated by others."[10] If judges experienced popular wrath, it was not inconceivable that lawyers might be next.

Full of such reflections, Adams dined with the clerk of the Superior Court, several members of the General Court, Professor John Winthrop and Dr. Cooper. The conversation was taken up entirely with the matter of the judges' salaries. There was general agreement in the group that the measure was a most dangerous one to the colony—"the ruin of the liberties of the country." But there seemed no effective way to combat it. John listened to the discussion in silence until Winthrop turned to him and said, "Mr. Adams, we have not heard your sentiments on this subject; how do you consider it?" It was, Adams agreed, a critical issue, "a stroke . . . leveled at the essence of the constitution; nothing was too dear to be hazarded in warding it off."

"But," Winthrop answered, "what can be done?"

John waited a moment, for effect. "I believe," he replied, "that there is one constitutional resource."

He was gratified by the exclamations of the company.

"Yes, a constitutional resource," he repeated. "The impeachment of the judges by the House of Representatives before the Council."

"An impeachment! Why, such a thing is without precedent."

Indeed, Adams agreed, it was without precedent in Massachusetts but there were many precedents, and most of them bad ones, in the Mother Country. The House of Commons had the right to impeach the justices of the executive courts in England and the Massachusetts House of Representatives had, by analogy, the same right in the Province. Adams' auditors were obviously startled by the novelty of the doctrine. The Council, it was pointed out, would never convict even if the House impeached. That, Adams answered, was, strictly speaking, beside the point. If the House was convinced that it had the power to impeach, it should not be deterred by the fear that the Council would not convict; the blame would then lie clearly at the door of the Council.[11]

When the company broke up, John knew that his highly original suggestion would be quickly bruited about, as indeed it was. Major Hawley came promptly to see him and John spent the better part of a day explaining his doctrine to the Northampton man and supporting it with references to *British State Trials,* Selden's treatise on the judicial powers of Parliament and similar works until Hawley left stuffed with citations, a convert to impeachment. Several days later another lawyer in the House came to him for instruction and, as Adams put it in later years, "it soon became the common topic and research of the bar." Hawley took the issue up with Judge Trowbridge, a member of the court, and an old friend of the Major. Trowbridge himself had renounced the salary but was naturally opposed to the movement for impeachment, although he conceded to Hawley that the charter gave such power to the House.

The House soon afterward appointed a committee to draw up charges of impeachment against Chief Justice Peter Oliver. Hawley was on the committee and he made Adams its unofficial counsel. The articles of impeachment were prepared under his direction, adopted by the House and sent up to the Council where, as had been anticipated, they rested. The victory seemed for the moment to lie with the opposition, but their triumph was short-lived. When the Superior Court came to sit in Boston for the Suffolk session, the grand and petty jurors rose as their names were called and refused to take the oaths, giving as their reason that the Chief Justice stood impeached before the Council of high crimes and misdemeanors and that they considered it improper to sit as jurors while those charges were pending. In each county the jurors followed the same course and the Court, jurorless, was unable to conduct its business.

March 5, 1774, saw the most solemn observance of the Massacre since its occasion. The oration, written by Benjamin Church and Joseph Warren and presented by Colonel John Hancock, was "an elegant, a pathetic, a spirited performance." Many in the large crowd wept and Adams himself, never inclined to be charitable in his judgments, was quite carried away. It was a general opinion that the Colonel, as the richest man in the Province, was especially moving in his attack on those who preferred riches to virtue!

"People who pay greater respect to a wealthy villain than to an honest, upright man in poverty almost deserve to be enslaved," Hancock declared. "They plainly show that wealth, however it may be acquired, is in their esteem to be preferred to virtue." After the speech John and Abigail dined with Hancock's father-in-law, Edmund Quincy, and found Quincy and his daughters "all joyous" at Hancock's success.

Meantime, Tory and Whig alike must wait to learn the fate that was being prepared for them in Parliament. Rumors arrived weekly—the duty on tea had been repealed; troops were on their way; the patriot leaders were to be indicted for treason, and so on. Adams was inclined to make light of such alarms.

On April 9, 1774, the Tories were in a "state of humiliation," "bowing, smiling, cringing, and seeming cordially friendly." For himself, John informed his friend James Warren, he felt confident that there was "not spirit enough on either side to bring the question to a complete decision, and that we shall oscillate like a pendulum, and fluctuate like the ocean, for many years to come, and never obtain a complete redress of American grievances, nor submit to an absolute establishment of parliamentary authority, but be trimming between both, as we have been for ten years past, for more years to come than you and I shall live."[12]

When the news of the Port Bill reached Boston early in May, even Hutchinson was dismayed by its severity; the patriot leaders saw they had been victims of self-delusion. Great Britain's retreat on the Stamp Act and on the Townshend duties had encouraged them to think that America needed only to stand firm to have her way. Just as Lord North believed the colonists would be too greedy to reject inexpensive tea, the colonists thought the British too mercenary to strike a blow that must inevitably hurt their own commerce.

The extent of their error was now apparent. The full weight of the greatest military and naval power in the world was to be marshaled to bring a handful of troublemakers to heel. John heard the news with mingled feelings. Abigail had been so ill through the winter months that John had dispatched her with the children to Braintree where, he thought, the sea air would restore her health. He himself suffered from one of his heavy and persistent colds. Although he battled it stubbornly, rising at sunup, walking three miles before breakfast, and taking another walk in the afternoon with frequent doses of the tea and medicines that Abigail sent him from Braintree, it hung on. His own infirmities, the word of the return of Abigail's sickness and the news from England—all "coming together," he wrote Abigail, "have put my utmost philosophy to the trial. . . . We live, my dear soul, in an age of trial," he added. "What must be the consequence I know not." The town of Boston was to be martyred. "It must expire," he wrote. "Our principal consolation is that it dies in a noble cause. The cause of truth, of virtue, of liberty and of humanity." Eventually it would have a glorious reformation "to greater wealth, splendor and power than ever." They must economize more carefully, for the law was moribund, and they must share with those less fortunate than themselves "very largely in proportion to our circumstances." Yet, serious as the outlook was, Adams was far from being "in the dumps." Indeed, the news had had the contrary effect. Now that the worst was known, he felt "more spirit and activity" than before. The wretched bill was simply a final gesture of despair on the part of Lord North. There would soon be a reaction in England that would sweep the man from power and bring redress.[13] The commerce of Boston had been, as events would show, an essential link in the entire British commercial system; the Mother Country could not long stand such a dislocation of its trade. So Adams reasoned and the inconsistencies in his reasoning reflected the ambiguity of his feelings—pessimism and gloom on the one hand, on the other the conviction that Britain would, as it had before, bend to colonial pressure.

While the Port Bill was tightening a noose about the city of Boston, the Regulation Bill, which swept away the colony's ancient charter, arrived and was at once put into effect. It served, as if anything further was needed, to underline the determination of the Mother Country to treat the colonies as complete dependencies. It demonstrated dramatically how vastly different England's view of her colonial relations was from that held in America. Clearly, the differences were irreconcilable and beyond compromise. Although individual colonists, under such pressure, began to align themselves more openly on one side or the other, the vast majority of the patriots simply refused to face the fact that they had embarked on a course that was carrying them toward civil war and independence. They continued to affirm their loyalty to the Crown and their devotion to the English constitution.

The Regulation Bill, in effect, brought an end to any pretense of orderly government in the colony. It was systematically evaded, as in the case of the forbidden town meetings which were held in the country and called county meetings; the courts could not sit and jurors refused to serve. Beyond the reach of the British soldiers, militia carried out drills and maneuvers. The Committee of Public Safety assumed more and more the functions of an extralegal, revolutionary government, denying all the while that it had any intention of promoting resistance to the Mother Country.

There was some solace for the patriots in Hutchinson's recall. Andrew Oliver, the Lieutenant Governor, had died in early March and General Thomas Gage, the popular commander-in-chief of the British continental forces, was appointed Governor of Massachusetts in addition to his military duties. On the thirteenth of May he landed at Long Wharf and received a salute from the ships and batteries of the Castle. The cadets under the command of Colonel John Hancock escorted him to the Town House, which was handsomely appointed, its brick freshly painted the color of stone. After an address from the Council, the General went on to an elegant public dinner at Faneuil Hall. The only jarring note in the day's activities came when the new Governor proposed a toast to his predecessor and was answered by loud hissing.

Close on Gage's heels came British redcoats—four regiments of infantry and three of artillery camped on the Common; the Welsh fusiliers were stationed on Fort Hill; other units were posted at Castle William and at Salem to protect the meeting of the so-called mandamus councilors, newly appointed by Gage under the Regulation Bill, and at Danvers to protect the Governor's residence. Boston and its environs decidedly took on the appearance of an occupied territory, swarming with soldiers and echoing with the martial sounds of drum and fife.

With the imposition of the Port Bill and the Regulation Act, the

Committee of Public Safety and the Committee of Correspondence began to function. If Boston was to withstand the authority of Parliament, it was necessary that it be supported by the interior towns of New England and by the other colonies. Massachusetts must appear as the first line of defense, an example to the other colonies of Britain's stony indifference to the liberties of Englishmen when claimed by Americans. Paul Revere was dispatched to New York and Philadelphia to muster support in those cities. There was an anxious interval while Massachusetts waited to find out whether it would be isolated from its sisters, in which case it must eventually and ignominiously capitulate, or whether the other provinces would make common cause with the northern rebel. First the interior towns of Massachusetts pledged themselves to send aid to their beleaguered capital, and subsequently word arrived of support from the colonies to the north and south. Samuel Adams and his cohorts began at once to plan a continental meeting, a congress like that which had met at the time of the Stamp Act, to concert common measures. As soon as the Assembly had convened at its new quarters at Salem, it resolved to call a Continental Congress to meet in September at Philadelphia for the ostensible purpose of providing relief for Boston and laying "a plan for a more lasting accommodation with Great Britain." It elected five delegates from Massachusetts: James Bowdoin, Samuel Adams, Thomas Cushing, Robert Treat Paine and John Adams. Before they could proceed further, General Gage sent a hasty message dissolving the House.

On the same day the Assembly was voting to call a Congress, John Adams acted as moderator of a Boston town meeting at which it was resolved, with only one dissenting vote, to refuse to pay for the tea which had been so unceremoniously dumped in the harbor.[14]

For Adams, being chosen as a delegate to the Congress to convene at Philadelphia in the fall was a source of deep satisfaction, although he grumbled and complained as usual, deplored the state of his health, the scarcity of business and his own inadequacy for the task ahead. "I suppose you sent me there to school," he wrote James Warren, who as a member of the Assembly had voted for him. "For my part, I am at a loss, totally at a loss, what to do when we get there; but I hope to be there taught. It is to be a school of political prophets, I suppose, a nursery of American statesmen. . . . Our policy must be to improve every opportunity and means for forming our people, and preparing leaders for them in the grand march of politics." Of the Congress itself he wrote: "May it thrive and prosper and flourish and from this fountain may there issue streams which shall gladden all the cities and towns in North America, forever. . . . We must recommend it to Mrs. Warren, and her friend Mrs. Adams," he added, "to teach our sons the divine science of the politics; and to be frank, I suspect they understand it better than we do."[15]

In his reply Warren congratulated Adams on being elected to "the Grand Council of America, an Assembly . . . of as great dignity and importance as any, either ancient or modern, that ever met," and reminded him of the fortitude of Brutus, Cassius, Hampden, Sidney, and Harrington, adding, "I have strong faith that the now rough and perilous paths of politics will soon be smoothed, and that our sons may walk in them without danger."[16] To which Adams could only echo amen. But there was "one ugly reflection" in his friend's letter. "Brutus and Cassius were conquered and slain," he wrote Warren, "Hampden died in the field, Sidney on the scaffold, Harrington in jail. . . . This is cold comfort. Politics are an ordeal among hot plowshares. Who, then, would be a politician for the pleasure of running about barefoot among them? Yet somebody must." He felt keenly his own "insufficiency." He needed to know far more than he did about "the characters which compose the Court of Great Britain, as well as of the people who compose the nation. . . . I have not that knowledge of the commerce, of the several colonies, or even of my own Province which may be necessary." The truth was that to be a continental statesman in the crisis that lay ahead one would need "as comprehensive knowledge of arts and science, especially of law and history, of geography, commerce, war and life . . . as was ever necessary for a British or a Roman senator, or a British or Roman general. Our New England educations are quite unequal to the production of such great characters," he concluded.

Like Warren, Adams could not bring himself to face fully the implications of the Port Bill and the Regulation Act. The Tories, he reported, scoffed at the idea that the colony would secure any redress of grievances by economic pressure, but he himself felt confident that ultimately "the commercial and manufacturing interests in G. Britain" would form an irresistible lobby for the American cause. "The national debts and taxes are so excessive," he wrote Warren, "that it seems to me impossible the people should bear the loss of so great a part of their trade." Yet the course of future events was, at best, obscure and Adams confessed that he had "grown more scrupulous of late than ever—more disposed to discuss, examine, and minutely weigh every political position." To Warren's suggestion that the colonists could carry the day by playing skillfully upon British fears, Adams replied dubiously, "They are a gallant, brave, high-spirited people still."[17]

His apprehensions would surely have been increased if he could have seen a letter of Lord Percy, second in command to Gage, who wrote that he found the people of Boston "extremely violent and wrong-headed; so much so that I fear we shall be obliged to come to extremities. . . . I am certain that it will require a great length of time, much steadiness, and many troops to re-establish good order and government. I plainly foresee that there is not a new [mandamus] councilor or magistrate who will dare to act without at least a regiment at his heels."[18]

XIII

BETWEEN Adams' choice as a delegate to the Continental Congress and the time when he must set off for Philadelphia there was an interval of some six weeks, a period which coincided with the eastern circuit of the Superior Court. The effort to impeach the judges and the uncertain state of affairs in the Province had reduced the cases which usually flooded the court to a trickle. Nonetheless Adams felt that he must be relentless in his pursuit of every shilling and copper so that he could leave Abigail with some little reserve of cash to tide her over in his absence. He decided also, "to prepare myself as well as I could, for the storm that was coming on," to return to Braintree and the farm.[1]

Adams found the now familiar circuit "the most tedious, the most irksome, the most gloomy and melancholy" he had ever made. Everywhere he went he found Tory sentiment. In York, Maine, he encountered "More persons . . . who call the destruction of the tea mischief and wickedness, than anywhere else; more persons who say that the duty upon tea is not a tax nor an imposition, because we are at liberty to use it or not." Indeed he had to listen to many lectures on the evils of the Boston mobs. He tried to discuss the issue calmly and objectively. "These bickerings of opposite parties, and their mutual reproaches, their declarations, their singsong, their triumphs and defiances, their dismals and their prophecies, are all delusion," he wrote.[2] History in its grand course was not to be fathomed by every crossroads politician and local seer. He wished "to discuss the question without all painting, pathos, rhetoric, or flourish of every kind," without emotion and rant, yet despite good intentions his own "zeal-pot" often boiled over. At Falmouth Foster Hutchinson got under John's skin with the suggestion that the patriots were hypocrites. "Why don't you pay for the tea?" he challenged. "Refuse to pay for the tea!" and then "go to fasting and praying for direction! Perfect blasphemy!"[3]

Adams felt the words like blows. He could not and would not defend riot and disorder. "Private mobs I do and will detest," he declared. "If popular commotions can be justified in opposition to attacks on the constitution, it can only be when fundamentals are invaded, nor then, unless for absolute necessity, and with great caution." The tarrings and featherings of unpopular officials, or of those suspected of Tory sympathies, the "breaking open of houses by rude and insolent rabble in resentment for private wrongs, or in pursuance of private prejudices and passions, must be discountenanced." Such actions could not be excused "upon any principle, which can be entertained by a good citizen, a worthy member of society." "For my part," he wrote, "it has long been my resolution to avoid being concerned in counseling, or aiding, or abetting tumult or disorder; to avoid all exceptional scribbling in the newspaper of every kind; to avoid all passion and personal altercation or reflections. I have found it difficult," he added, with characteristic candor, "to keep these resolutions exactly; all but the last, however, I have religiously and punctiliously observed these six years."[4]

At Falmouth he met Jonathan Sewall once more. The two friends took a walk on the high hill above Casco Bay. It was evident that Sewall had something in mind besides a sociable ramble. He was determined to make one final effort to save John's political soul; he begged him not to serve as a delegate to Congress. To do so would be to place himself forever with those who were, in effect, rebelling against the Mother Country, it would ruin a brilliant career in the law and bring upon himself the danger of punishment for treason against His Majesty's government. "Great Britain is determined on her system," he told John; "her power [is] irresistible, and it will certainly be destructive to you, and to all those who . . . persevere in opposition to her designs."

"I know," John answered, "that Great Britain is determined in her system, and that very determination determined me on mine." And then with a conscious sense of drama: "I have passed the Rubicon; swim or sink, live or die, survive or perish with my country—that is my unalterable determination."

Sewall persisted doggedly in the unequal contest, until at last John cut him short. They must go separate roads; for his part he went with a bleeding heart, full of warm memories of their friendship. This farewell, he told his companion, "is the sharpest thorn on which I ever set my foot."[5] They were not to meet again for ten years and then under very different circumstances.

The circuit gave him too much time to think, and the thoughts were uncomfortable ones. "I cannot," he wrote Abigail, "with all my philosophy and Christian resignation, keep up my spirits. The dismal prospect before me, my family, and my country, is too much for my fortitude."[6]

His only consolation was writing to Abigail—long, anguished letters, sometimes several a day, pouring out his hopes and fears. He had ridden out on circuit expecting to find the Province firm and resolute in the cause of liberty. Instead he had found the timid, the trimmers and the Tories in disconcerting numbers (from Arundel he wrote, "Divines and lawyers this way are all Tories.").[7] With the colony under martial law and the future clouded with uncertainty, he worried constantly about his finances. He could not help contrasting the simple style in which he lived with that of lawyers in the towns he passed through. Writing to Abigail in a defeated mood, he gave in to self-pity: "My life has been a continual scene of fatigue, vexation, labor, and anxiety. . . . I had a pretty estate from my father; I have been assisted by your father; I have done the greatest business in the Province; I have had the very richest clients in the Province. Yet I am poor in comparison with others." His precarious finances were due, he confessed, to imprudence. He had spent a comfortable fortune in books and bought a larger house in Boston than he could really afford.[8]

In such a temper he missed his family and Braintree more acutely than ever before: "My fancy, wishes and desires are at Braintree, among my field, pastures and meadows, as much as those of the Israelites were among the leeks, garlics and onions of the Land of Goshen," he wrote Abigail. His thoughts were "continually with you and in the neighborhood of you, and with your little prattling Nabby, Johnny, Charley and Tommy. . . . Pray remember me to my dear little babes, whom I long to see running to meet me and climb upon me," he added. The heat was oppressive and his horse turned out to be so hard-gaited that he was continually sore. Depressed by the feelings of people he encountered, he declared: "I confess myself to be full of fears that the ministry and their friends and instruments will prevail, and crush the cause and friends of liberty. . . . I will not lie down in despair. If I cannot serve my children by the law, I will serve them by agriculture, by trade, by some way or other."[9]

The impending Congress at Philadelphia was also much on his mind. He was, as we have seen, concerned about his own adequacy, but quite as much, he was anxious about the spirit of that crucial body. "Great things are wanted to be done," he wrote to his wife, "and little things only I fear can be done. I dread the thought of the Congress falling short of the expectations of the continent, but especially of the people of this Province." For himself he would "enjoy good company, good conversation, and . . . a fine ride and see a little more of the world than I have seen before."[10]

As to the stream of letters he dispatched to Abigail, he advised her "to put them up safe and preserve them. They may exhibit to our posterity," he wrote, "a kind of picture of the manners, opinions, and principles of these times of perplexity, danger, and distress."[11]

Among the petty annoyances of the circuit was the scarcity of tea. For Adams it was both a medicine and a delicious beverage, but it was seldom to be had. At Falmouth after a hot, dusty ride of thirty miles, he could not resist begging a cup at Mrs. Huston's tavern. "Madam," he asked, wistfully, "is it lawful for a weary traveler to refresh himself with a dish of tea, provided it has been honestly smuggled or paid no duties?"

"No, sir," that lady replied sternly, "we have renounced all tea in this place, but I'll make you coffee." And so coffee was all that he had to drink at Mrs. Huston's. "Tea must be universally renounced," he wrote Abigail, "and I must be weaned, and the sooner the better."

By the middle of July his "tedious peregrinations" were over and John was happily united with his family. While he made preparations to depart for Philadelphia, Joseph Hawley wrote him a long and remarkable letter from Northampton, assuring him first of his qualifications as a delegate to the Congress and then exhorting him to patience, moderation and courage. The Congress, Hawley said, must act with caution but with firmness. Perhaps most of all, since this would be the first continental conclave in almost ten years, a spirit of harmony and accord must be created among the delegates. Everything tending "to cement the body ought to be practiced; and everything in the least tending to create disgust or strangeness, coldness, or so much as indifference, carefully avoided." In the other colonies there is the feeling that the patriots of Massachusetts, especially those of Boston, "do affect to dictate and take the lead in continental measures; that we are apt, from an inward vanity and self-conceit, to assume big and haughty airs. . . . Now I pray that everything in the conduct and behavior of our gentlemen which might tend to beget or strengthen such an opinion might be most carefully avoided."

It was most probable, Hawley reminded Adams, that the Massachusetts delegates would meet gentlemen from other colonies "fully equal to yourselves or any of you, in their knowledge of Great Britain, the colonies, law, history, government, commerce, etc." The Massachusetts men must thus be on guard against any suggestion of arrogance or superiority. In addition, there might be delegates from other colonies of Dutch, Scottish or Irish ancestry who are "very worthy, learned men." The New Englanders must be careful to avoid saying anything that would offend such men, "for as of every nation and blood, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him, so they ought to be of us. . . . That which disparages our family, ancestors or nation is apt to stick by . . . and their blood you will find as warm as ours."

It was especially important that the Southerners whose colonies had suffered no such direct assaults as Massachusetts understand that the issue went far beyond taxation and revenue. Hawley knew Adams' quick temper and his touchiness. The older man's wise reflections would help John to keep his political balance in Philadelphia.[12]

Adams took advantage of the interval between the end of the Court term and the time of setting out for the Congress to concentrate his attention on the Braintree farm. There, he wrote to Warren, "no clients disturb me, no politicians interrupt me, no Tories vex me, no tyrants govern me, I had almost said no Devils tempt or torment me." He joined with his hired hands mowing, raking and carting. Working in his field "among the hay cocks," he speculated on the revolutions in France that would follow after the death of Louis XV. As he forked hay or spread manure he tried to imagine how a Sully, a Pitt, a Demosthenes, or a Cicero would have reacted to the present crisis. Undoubtedly with militant vigor, yet "patience, prudence, resignation, candor and all that" must be the American path.

XIV

On Wednesday, the tenth of August, the delegates set out from Thomas Cushing's house in Boston. James Bowdoin had declined to serve and the two Adamses and Paine shared a chaise. They got a royal sendoff with an escort that rode to Watertown with them and there entertained the four delegates at Coolidge's tavern with an elegant dinner. Adams described it as "a most kindly and affectionate meeting . . . beyond all description affecting."[1] With his keen sense of history, he was well aware of the significance of the moment. The Congress that was to meet in Philadelphia might well decide the fate of America —whether there was the will to resist British encroachments or whether local views and timid and indecisive men would immobilize the "Grand Assembly," and leave Massachusetts to the mercy of Great Britain.

At Hartford the Massachusetts men met Silas Deane, a delegate from Connecticut, "a gentleman of a liberal education, about forty years of age; first kept a school, then studied law, then married [a] rich widow." It was Deane's opinion that the Congress would be "the grandest and most important assembly ever held in America, and that the *all* of America is intrusted to it and depends upon it."

A number of Connecticut patriots waited on the Massachusetts delegates and rode along to Deane's house in Wethersfield where the party was entertained "most cordially and genteelly" with punch, wine and coffee. Indeed the delegates' journey rapidly turned into a triumphal procession. At the outskirts of each considerable town a goodly company of patriots met the travelers, escorting them to a local tavern to wine and dine them, to express their solidarity with the Bay colony, and to pledge their support in advance for the actions of Congress. Seven miles outside New Haven carriages and horsemen were waiting, the sheriff of the county, the constable of the town, the justices of the peace among them. As the party approached the city all the bells were set to ringing and the doors and windows were crowded with people watching the procession as if it were a coronation. At nine o'clock some dozen cannon were fired on the common and such a stream of visitors came to pay their respects that Adams could not keep track of their names. Another of the Connecticut delegates introduced himself at Isaac Bear's tavern—Roger Sherman, a lawyer and ex-shoemaker, a rough, awkward individual with a prognathian jaw and huge hands who impressed Adams as "a solid, sensible man"; Sherman's only criticism of Massachusetts was that it had not been bold enough.

From New Haven they pushed on down the Connecticut, past Milford, where they visited the grave of Paine's great-grandfather, Robert Treat, Governor of Connecticut for thirty years; through Stratford, then Stamford and arrived at Rye, their first stopping place in the Province of New York. On Saturday, August 20, the party arrived in New York City. Adams was full of curiosity and expectation. New York was a great port, a city of aristocrats, a stronghold of Tory sympathizers. As soon as they were settled, Alexander McDougall, leader of the New York Sons of Liberty, came to visit them. Adams was pleased by his candor and common sense. "He has none of the mean cunning which disgraces so many of my countrymen," he noted in the diary.

After dinner, accompanied by McDougall, the four New Englanders walked about the city. They went first to Fort George, from which they could view the Hudson River on the one side of the island and the East River on the other and, farther to the east, Long Island. The little group walked up Broadway, "a fine street, very wide," past the two Episcopal churches, the prison, "a handsome stone building," and King's College (later Columbia); the streets, John noted, were "vastly more regular and elegant than those in Boston, and the houses are more grand, as well as neat." Then down to the wharves, on through the market and business section of the city, and finally to the coffeehouse where they met McDougall's lieutenant, John Morin Scott.

Monday they all went to Scott's "elegant seat" on the Hudson River for breakfast. John noted every detail—the handsome "rural prospect," the "fine airy entry" and the "elegant breakfast . . . rich plate, a very large silver coffeepot, a very large silver teapot, napkins of the very finest materials, and toast and bread and butter in great perfection. After breakfast a plate of beautiful peaches, another of pears, and another of plums, and a muskmelon were placed on the table."

There Adams also met William Livingston, writer and patriot, one of the delegates from New Jersey to the Congress, and William Smith, the author of an excellent history of the Province of New York. James Duane was another of the company, a land speculator and solid friend of liberty, a man with "a sly, surveying eye, a little squint-eyed . . . very sensible . . . and very artful."

Friends of Duane in England had reported to him that the nation was hard-set against the colonies; that merchants, tradespeople and farmers were united; that English pride had been touched and that it was futile to hope for support from any considerable group in England.

According to Scott, Mr. John Jay, "a young gentleman of the law," was "a hard student and a good speaker"; and Mr. John Alsop, "a soft, sweet man." McDougall took the occasion to describe for Adams the complexities of New York politics. There was a powerful party which, though friendly to liberty, was obsessed by the fear of a civil war. These had been kept in the patriot ranks by the assurance that nonimportation would bring Great Britain to terms. Another party, marked by a strong aristocratic temper, feared that the "leveling spirit of the New England colonies" would spread to New York. Still another group of strong Episcopalians were prejudiced against the New Englanders on religious grounds. A fourth party, composed primarily of merchants, strongly opposed the movement for nonimportation and nonexportation, and a final group, aligned with the royal Governor, had either received or sought favors from him.

In the afternoon Scott called for the Massachusetts delegates and took them to the home of Mr. Platt, another staunch patriot, and there John again was dazzled by the opulence. In a handsome house with furniture as rich and splendid as that of Nicholas Boylston, John met four more of the New York leaders. Peter Livingston and Philip Livingston were members of the great Livingston clan which together with the Delanceys had dominated the life of the colony for almost a hundred years. Peter Livingston, a prosperous merchant, was, in John's view, a sensible gentleman; but Philip was another matter, "a great, rough, rapid mortal" who bore down the rest of the company, blustering away, declaring that if England should cut the colonies adrift they would instantly start civil wars among themselves to determine which colony should govern the rest, denouncing the "leveling spirit" of New England and the activities of the Boston mobs, even going so far as to throw out a few hints about the Goths and the Vandals.

"Why, you even hung some inoffensive, poor Quakers!" Livingston said.

Adams, keeping his temper under control, answered that the very existence of the Bay colony had then been at stake, surrounded by warlike Indians. If the Quakers had been allowed to carry on their agitation the colonists could not have withstood the savages.

These were the men to whom the New Englanders must appeal for support. John thought of Joseph Hawley's advice and realized that the New Englanders had to travel a rocky road to achieve continental unity. At the coffeehouse, the Massachusetts delegates saw the recently arrived issues of the *Virginia Gazette* and took heart from them. "The spirit of the people is prodigious," Adams wrote; "their resolutions are really grand."

So they went about "breakfasting, dining, drinking coffee," while John chafed at the social round and longed to see "the college, the churches, the printers' offices, and booksellers' shops." In his diary he caustically observed: "With all the opulence and splendor of this city, there is very little good breeding to be found. We have been treated with an assiduous respect. But I have not seen one real gentleman, one well-bred man, since I came to town. At their entertainments there is no conversation that is agreeable. There is no modesty, no attention to one another. They talk very loud, very fast, and all together. If they ask you a question, before you can utter three words of your answer, they will break out upon you again, and talk away."

Finally John and his companions broke away from the social whirl to visit the college, Holt, "the liberty printer," and Noel and Hazard's bookstore. From there they went to dine with the Committee of Correspondence, some fifty gentlemen, who produced the most splendid meal Adams had ever seen in honor of the New Englanders.

On Friday, after almost a week of sight-seeing and entertainment, the weary delegates took the Paulus Hook ferry to the Jersey shore, and thence across the flats to Brunswick. The next day they arrived at Princeton, put up at the Hudibras Tavern near Nassau Hall, and inspected the College of New Jersey. Adams was especially interested in the scientific apparatus, the principal feature of which was "a most beautiful machine—an orrery or planetarium, constructed by Mr. [David] Rittenhouse, of Philadelphia." Put into motion by turning a crank, the planetarium exhibited "almost every motion in the astronomical world; the motions of the sun and all the planets, with all their satellites, the eclipses of the sun and the moon, etc." The electrical apparatus was likewise "the most complete and elegant" that John had ever seen.

While their guide, Mr. Houston, professor of natural philosophy, was attempting to charge a vacuum bottle and perform an experiment for his guests, the bell for prayers rang and the little party hurried on to the chapel. President John Witherspoon conducted the service and Adams observed dryly that the scholars sang "as badly as the Presbyterians at New York." After chapel they viewed the surrounding countryside from the balcony of Nassau Hall and then went to President Witherspoon's house for a glass of wine. Witherspoon, a member of the New Jersey Committee of Correspondence and a delegate to his colony's Provincial Congress, was "as high a son of liberty as any man in America." He assured his visitors that the students were all good patriots and pointed out to them the importance of public information, of creating a favorable image of America in the outside world, and especially in the Mother Country. Congress, he said, "should raise money and employ a number of writers in the newspapers in England, to explain to the public the American plea, and remove the prejudices of Britons." It was a typical academic solution. The root of the trouble was misunderstanding and misunderstanding could be removed through education.

In the evening they were visited by "young Whitwell," a scholar from Boston, who told the delegates that "the government of this college is very strict, and the scholars study very hard."

On Sunday, Adams "heard Dr. Witherspoon all day"—that is, at morning and afternoon services—and found him "a clear, sensible" if uninspired preacher. After John returned from meeting, he settled down to write Abigail. She had written him soon after his departure, expressing her loneliness and her doubts and fears. She had little expectation that the contest would be resolved peaceably. There was no instance in history where a people whose liberties had once been infringed had ever regained them except by war. She had "taken a very great fondness for reading Rollins's *Ancient History*," she wrote. In its pages could be found many inspiring examples of courage and fortitude in defense of liberty, and she encouraged seven-year-old Johnny to read aloud to her from the heavy volume, hoping that he would thereby "entertain a fondness for it." The drought had been so severe, she noted, that "my poor cows will certainly [submit] a petition to you, setting forth their grievances and informing you that they have been deprived of their ancient privileges" of sweet grass and clover. The month of September, Abigail added, "perhaps may be of as much importance to Great Britain as the Ides of March were to Caesar."[2]

In his reply John excused himself for not having written sooner. He wanted to be sure his letters went by safe hands and were not intercepted by Tories. What he had seen and heard would take up a volume and must wait for telling until his return. It was sufficient to say that they had been cordially received everywhere and had "formed acquaintances with the most eminent and famous men in the several colonies we have passed through." The next day they would "reach the theater of action"—Philadelphia. "I have the strongest hopes we shall see a clearer sky and better times," he added. The education of the children was seldom out of his mind: "Train them to virtue. Habituate them to industry, activity, and spirit. Make them consider vice as shameful and unmanly. Fire them with ambition to be useful. . . . Fix their ambition upon great and solid objects, and their contempt upon little, frivolous and useless ones. It is time, my dear, for you to begin to teach them French," he advised Abigail. "Every decency, grace, and honesty should be inculcated upon them."[3]

John and Abigail had, as we have seen, corresponded before, but the correspondence which began with John's attendance at the Continental Congress marked in a sense the formal start of one of the greatest epistolary dialogues between husband and wife in all history.

It was a correspondence that for both was an essential food of the mind and spirit. Abigail's letters sustained her husband through all the storms and tempests of his public life. His gave her comfort during the long months and then the years of their successive separations.

From Princeton, the Massachusetts men pushed on the last leg of their long journey—through Trenton, marked by its tall black walnut trees which provided the principal wood for Boston's cabinetmakers, across the Delaware by ferry to the Province of Pennsylvania, through Bristol to Philadelphia, the greatest city of colonial America, the greatest city of the British Empire. At Frankford, five miles out, a company of gentlemen met them—John Rutledge of South Carolina, the New Hampshire delegates, and a number of Pennsylvania patriots. When they reached Philadelphia the travelers, "dirty, dusty, and fatigued" as they were, could not resist going to the City Tavern, "the most genteel one in America." There they met more Philadelphia patriots and Christopher Gadsden and Thomas Lynch of South Carolina. They were all soon deep in political conversation interrupted only by a supper "as elegant as ever was laid upon a table" and washed down with madeira wine which kept them eating and talking until eleven o'clock.

The New England delegates spent the day after their arrival sightseeing, visiting the famous market, the State House and Carpenters' Hall, where Congress was to sit. They stopped for a noonday dinner at Thomas Mifflin's "grand, spacious, and elegant house" where they met Charles Thomson, known as the Sam Adams of Philadelphia. John was impressed with the regularity of the city, with its parallel streets—2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, etc., bisected by cross streets "equally wide, straight and parallel to each other . . . named from forest and fruit trees—Pear Street, Apple Street, Walnut Street, Chestnut Street, etc."

In the afternoon they visited the hospital, the city's pride. In the lower cells, underground, were the lunatics, "some furious, some merry, some melancholy, and, among the rest," Adams noted, "John Ingham, whom I once saved at Taunton Court from being whipped and sold for horse stealing."

The sickrooms were long and narrow with rows of beds on either side of a central aisle. This innovation, so rational and efficient, seemed to Adams to present "a dreadful scene of human wretchedness." From the sickrooms Dr. William Shippen, head of the hospital, conducted them to his own office where he showed his visitors "a series of anatomical paintings of exquisite art." The charts showed a variety of views of the human body "whole and in parts" and the doctor entertained John and his fellow delegates with "a very clear, concise and comprehensive lecture upon all the parts of the human frame. . . . He first showed us a set of paintings of bodies entire and alive—then of others with the skin taken off, then with the first coat of muscles taken off, then with the second, then with all—the bare bones. Then he showed us paintings of the insides of a man, seen before, all the muscles of the belly being taken off. The heart, lungs, stomach, guts, etc." Philadelphia was as far ahead of Boston in medicine as Boston was ahead of the younger city in political agitation. "This entertainment charmed me," Adams wrote in his diary.[4]

By all odds the leading Philadelphia patriot was John Dickinson. His *Letters of a Pennsylvania Farmer,* written in 1768 at the time of the Townshend duties, had been the most widely read and influential statement of colonial cause. It, and his Liberty Song which John had sung with so much gusto at the Watertown Sons of Liberty celebration five years before, had made him famous with patriots in every colony. Adams looked forward eagerly to meeting the Farmer, who was in truth far less of a farmer than an extremely shrewd and successful lawyer. Dickinson arrived to visit the Massachusetts delegates in a coach drawn by four beautiful horses, strange equipage for a revolutionary politician. Like Adams, the Farmer was a valetudinarian and he began at once to recount the details of his ill-health which had been climaxed by a painful case of gout. He indeed looked ravaged, "slender as a reed; pale as ashes." It seemed to John that he could hardly live a month, yet as he talked, Adams became conscious of a wiry, resilient spirit.

There were a succession of visits to a Cadwalader, a Powell, to Joseph Galloway, Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly, Dr. Smith, provost of the College of Philadelphia, and dozens more. The man who perhaps impressed Adams most was Thomas Lynch. The New Englanders were all "vastly pleased" with him and judged him a solid, firm, judicious man. Lynch charmed them by observing that Colonel George Washington, a prominent Virginia patriot and colonel of the Virginia militia, had made the most eloquent speech in the Virginia convention. "I will raise one thousand men, subsist them at my own expense, and march myself at their head for the relief of Boston," Lynch quoted the Virginian as saying.

On the evening of September 1 the twenty-five delegates who had arrived in Philadelphia for the Congress—Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina and New York were still unrepresented—met at the new City Tavern and spent a warm and convivial evening together. The next day the Virginians arrived and the Massachusetts delegates went to the City Tavern to meet them. It was a dramatic moment in the history of the revolutionary crisis. The gentlemen planters of Virginia and the lawyers and merchants of Massachusetts had been foremost in the struggle against Great Britain. The Southern colony could match Samuel Adams with Patrick Henry, John Hancock with Richard Henry Lee or

George Washington, John Adams with Richard Bland. Together they must bear the brunt of the opposition to Parliament, plot the course, devise strategy, frame resolutions and draw with them the hesitant and timid of other colonies. The success of any sustained resistance to British tyranny depended on a firm alliance between these two colonies so startingly different in character and outlook. Virginia was an aristocratic society dominated by great plantations and based on the servile labor of the black. Massachusetts was, in practical terms, a democratic middle-class society, based on small, self-sufficient farms and active commerce. The two colonies had many differences and little or nothing in common except their English ancestry and a determination to claim their rights as Englishmen.

When the Virginians and the Massachusetts men met at the City Tavern, the contrast between the two groups was striking. The Southerners had an easy affability, an expansiveness, a conscious graciousness of manner that bespoke the grand gentleman. The New Englanders on the other hand were stiff and awkward, like country boys at a ball. But a mutual dedication to the cause of liberty carried both parties beyond the parochialism that under different circumstances would have caused them to view each other with instinctive hostility. The grand airs of the Virginians thus appeared as brotherly warmth and the surface coldness of the Massachusetts men was taken for republican simplicity.

Even Benjamin Harrison, huge of girth and overly fond of coarse stories, was accepted as a brother in the cause. Richard Bland's learned, "bookish" look appealed to Adams at once. Edmund Randolph won him with his handsome face and figure and his charm. Richard Henry Lee was "a masterly man," a "sensible and deep thinker," fiery enough for Samuel Adams' taste.

Lee declared that the Congress should insist on the repeal of every revenue law, the Boston Port Bill, and the Regulation Act and that it could secure such repeal by "an abstinence from all dutied articles"—rum, molasses, sugar, tea, wine, and fruits. He was confident that the ship which carried to England the news of such action by the Congress would bring back the redress. The colonists should indeed go further, in Lee's opinion, and inform His Majesty that they could never be happy while Lords Bute, North and Mansfield were his councilors. Listening to the Virginian, Adams was more impressed by his spirit than by his logic.

In the late morning Caesar Rodney, a delegate from the lower counties on the Delaware River, arrived in the city and the New Englanders met him and two Tilghmans from Maryland. Adams found Rodney "the oddest looking man in the world . . . tall, then . . . his face is not bigger than a large apple, yet there is sense and fire, spirit, wit and humor in his countenance." The group then went off with

Mr. William Barrell to his store and there drank punch and ate smoked sprats. That evening there was a reception for the delegates at the Mifflin mansion, followed by dinner, featuring a number of patriotic toasts. Colonel Harrison offered "A constitutional death to Lords Bute, Mansfield and North." Robert Treat Paine gave, "May the collision of British flint and American steel produce that spark of liberty which shall illumine the latest posterity!" Others proposed, "Wisdom to Britain, and firmness to the colonies!" "May Britain be wise and America free!" "The Union of the Colonies!" "Unanimity to the Congress!" Richard Henry Lee, who had been drinking burgundy with John Dickinson all afternoon, was noticeably high and more confident than ever that England must give way to colonial demands or face ruin.

Sunday John spent in a survey of two of the city's churches and rendered a harsh verdict on their preachers. If Philadelphia was superior to Boston in medicine and science, it lagged far behind in theology and pulpit eloquence.

Monday, September 5, the delegates assembled at Carpenters' Hall and after an inspection pronounced it a fit chamber for their deliberations. Peyton Randolph was nominated for chairman of the Congress by Thomas Lynch and was chosen unanimously. Charles Thomson was then appointed secretary and after a discussion about the rules under which the Congress should act, Patrick Henry rose and pointed out that as this was the first such general congress and others might follow, precedents should be established with the greatest care. For instance, it would be a great injustice if, in voting on issues, a small and sparsely populated colony should have as much weight as a large and populous one.

To Sullivan's protest that the small colonies had an equal stake with the large ones, Patrick Henry replied with a burst of his famous oratory. "Government," he declared, "is dissolved. . . . Where are your landmarks, your boundaries of colonies? We are in a state of nature, sir." He was for doing justly and giving satisfaction to every colony but it was plain, in his view, that the delegates must transcend their local prejudices. "The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American."

The delegates then proceeded to a warm debate on the basis of representation. Henry had proposed numbers; Lynch suggested property. Governor Ward of Rhode Island pointed out in rebuttal that the counties of Virginia varied in population yet each sent two delegates to the House of Burgesses. After more discussion it became clear that there was no practical method of voting except by colony and so it was decided.

Thomas Cushing's suggestion that the Congress should be opened each day with prayer ran on the rock of religious diversity. Some of the delegates were Quakers, some Anglicans, some Presbyterians and some Congregationalists. At this point, Samuel Adams, aware that the New Englanders were thought to be narrow religious zealots and conscious of the opportunity to score some points with his Virginia allies, rose and said, "I am not a religious bigot; I can hear a prayer from a gentleman of piety and virtue, who is at the same time a friend to his country." He understood that the Reverend Mr. Jacob Duché, an Episcopal clergyman, was such a man and he therefore moved that he be requested to read prayers to Congress the next morning.

It was a happy selection. Mr. Duché, without any suggestion of the sentiments which were eventually to make him a Tory, read the Collect for the seventh of September, the thirty-fifth Psalm, starting: "Plead thou my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me, and fight thou against them that fight against me," and then prayed extemporaneously and so eloquently that John and the delegates were quite carried away. It seemed as if God had ordained the Psalm for the occasion, and Adams confessed that the prayer, Episcopalian though it was, was the best he had ever heard. "Dr. Cooper himself never prayed with such fervor, such ardor, such earnestness and pathos, and in language so elegant and sublime for America, for the Congress, for the Province of Massachusetts, and especially the town of Boston," he wrote Abigail.[5]

Having decided on a vote by colonies, the delegates proceeded to appoint two committees—the first, to consist of twenty-two members, two from each colony (North Carolina and Georgia were still unrepresented), was instructed to "state the rights of the colonies in general, the several instances in which these rights are violated or infringed, and the means most proper to be pursued for obtaining a restoration of them." The second committee, made up of one delegate from each colony, was to examine and report on the statutes which affected the trade and manufactures of the colonies.

John and Samuel Adams were the Massachusetts representatives on the first, and most important, committee. This committee at once launched itself on a discussion of the basic rights of the colonies. The delegates, almost without exception, were convinced that the colonists indeed had rights, chief among them the right not to be taxed without their consent. But did this right, and others as well, rest upon the relatively new theory of the "natural rights of man," upon the unwritten British constitution, upon the charters of the individual colonies, or upon all three taken together? The "rights of man" basis was the most comprehensive, the most abstract, the most vague and thus the most slippery, particularly from a legal point of view. On the other hand the argument from the British constitution was, in some ways, equally unsatisfactory. The British insisted that they were better qualified to say what the consitution was than their remote colonies. British constitutional theory had been, moreover, in the past fifty or seventy-five years moving in the direction of unchecked parliamentary authority. Sir William Blackstone, the most recent authority, declared the supremacy of Parliament to be uncontrollable, except by themselves. On the matter of representation, the British logic was quite different from the American. The British were committed to a system by which, in effect, large portions of their own population were not represented in Parliament. These spots, cities like Birmingham and Manchester among them, were considered to be "virtually" represented; their interests were, generally speaking, synonymous with the interests of the nation and of the empire. The colonies were likewise virtually represented. Although the colonists had time and again exposed the fallacy of this argument to their own satisfaction, they had made little impression on the ministers of His Majesty's government. The authority of the British constitution was thus, at best, a debatable ground and the colonial charters almost equally so. Each charter contained a clause specifically granting the respective colony the "rights, privileges and immunities of Englishmen," but these rights, privileges and immunities were nowhere spelled out unless it might be in the Revolution Settlement and the Bill of Rights accepted by William, Prince of Orange, on his accession to the throne of England in 1689.

All these points the committee painstakingly reviewed. John Jay stated that colonial rights must be based on the law of nature and the British constitution, since the charter rights in a sense rested upon the proper interpretation of the constitution. The problem was a knotty one and the delegates went round and round about it, developing the contradictions and paradoxes in each position. The Virginians, Pendleton and Lee, inclined to the law of nature, but Rutledge of South Carolina answered, "Our claims, I think, are well founded on the British constitution and not on the law of nature."

James Duane of New York, in common with the more conservative members of the convention, was in favor of "grounding colonial rights" on the "laws and constitution of the country from whence we sprung, and from our charters, without recurring to the law of nature. . . . Charters are compacts between the Crown and the people, and I think on this foundation the charter governments stand firm." England had a limited monarchy and a free constitution. The privileges of Englishmen were inherent, their birthright and inheritance, and could not be taken from them without their consent. The objection that had been made to this position was that it would in effect make the colonies independent, but this need not be the case; the colonies could be united with the Mother Country in the Crown.

Joseph Galloway confessed that he had never been able to discover the rights of Americans in some finely drawn distinction between taxation and other forms of legislation, or in the distinction between laws for revenue and laws for the regulation of trade. Nor could he find them in a Lockean original state of nature, but rather in a proper nature of a mature political society. "I have looked for them," Galloway declared, "in the constitution of the English government, and there found them. We may draw from this source securely." The laws that affected Americans were the laws made in England before the colonists came to the New World. "I never could see any reason to allow that we are bound to any law made since, nor could I ever make any distinction between the sorts of law. I have ever thought we might reduce our rights to one—an exemption from all laws made by British Parliament since the emigration of our ancestors. It follows, therefore, that all the acts of Parliament made since are violations of our rights."

Adams and the other members of the committee were startled at Galloway's expression of such emphatic and extreme views. He was known as a cautious and moderate man, and here, suddenly, he seemed ready to throw down a challenge to the Mother Country that she could hardly except, a challenge that went far beyond the redress of specific grievances.

Adams shared Galloway's views up to a point. Like the Philadelphian, he far preferred to argue from the law and the constitution rather than from any vague formula of natural rights. The rights of Englishmen were quite enough for him if he could be assured of having them. But the difficulty was that, by resting the colonial cause entirely on the constitution, the colonies ran the risk of getting hopelessly bogged down in fine points of constitutional interpretation. What would then be the result if England took such action as would force the colonies to resist by force of arms? Where would the constitutional argument lie then? An appeal to the law of nature would, in essence, provide a prepared position on which the colonies could take their stand if the issue came to the test of arms.

Day after weary day the committee returned to the problem. Adams was much encouraged by the general spirit of unanimity and good will that dominated the debates. In addition, he found that Massachusetts delegates were rather lionized. Philadelphia patriots vied with each other to wine and dine them and when the false rumor reached Philadelphia that Boston had been bombarded by the British fleet the spontaneous expressions of sympathy and support brought tears to John's eyes. "The spirit, the firmness, the prudence of our Province are vastly applauded," he wrote Abigail, "and we are universally acknowledged the saviors and defenders of American liberty."[6]

The good food and the good company impressed him perhaps as much as the fraternal spirit. His diet was forgotten in "sinful feasts" of "everything which could delight the eye or allure the taste; curds and creams, jellies, sweetmeats of various sorts, twenty sorts of tarts, fools, trifles, floating islands, whipped syllabubs . . . Parmesan cheese, punch, wine, porter, beer, etc." His diary contained mouth-watering inventories of Philadelphian delicacies. At the home of a young Quaker attorney, Miers Fisher and his pretty wife, he had a most un-Quakerish meal of "ducks, hams, chicken, beef, pig, tarts, creams, custards, jellies . . . beer, porter, punch, wine."[7] Dining with Mr. Benjamin Chew, Chief Justice of Pennsylvania, and the Virginia delegates at four o'clock in the afternoon, he enjoyed turtle "and every other thing" including a dessert of "fruits, raisins, almonds, pears, peaches," and "wines," he noted, "most excellent and admirable. I drank madeira at a great rate and found no inconvenience in it."[8]

Of the Philadelphians, John found Mr. Willing, a justice of the Provincial Superior Court, "the most sociable, agreeable man of all." After a visit with Willing, John and Thomas Cushing went with Joseph Reed to the Moravian evening lecture, "where we heard soft, sweet music, and a Dutchified English prayer and preachment."

John Dickinson, Benjamin Rush, Charles Thomson, and Thomas Mifflin were Adams' most frequent company. At the Thomsons' with Dickinson, his wife and niece as the only other guests, John had "a most delightful afternoon; sweet communion, indeed. . . . Mr. Dickinson gave us his thoughts and his correspondence very freely." With Dickinson, Adams went to see Dr. Abraham Chovet's waxworks, "most admirable, exquisite representations of the whole animal economy. Four complete skeletons; a leg with all the nerves, veins, and arteries injected with wax; two complete bodies in wax, full grown; waxen representations of all the muscles, tendons, etc., of the head, brain, heart, lungs, liver, stomach, guts, gall bladder, testicles."

Attractive as Philadelphia was, John would concede it little in comparison with Boston. "The morals of our people are much better," he wrote. "Their manners are more polite and agreeable—they are purer English. Our language is better, our persons are handsomer, our spirit is greater, our laws are wiser, our religion is superior, our education is better. We exceed them in everything but in a market, and in charitable public foundations."[9]

The social life of the city was not, John assured himself, simply a round of frivolity and feasting. It served the important purpose of enabling him to get to know the leaders from other colonies on a friendly and informal basis, an opportunity "to get acquainted with the tempers, views, characters, and designs of persons," as he wrote Abigail, "and to let them into the circumstances of our Province."[10]

As Adams expressed it in a letter to his former law student, William Tudor: "We have numberless prejudices to remove here. We have been obliged to act with great delicacy and caution. We have been obliged to keep ourself out of sight, and to feel pulses and sound the depths; to insinuate our sentiments, designs, and desires by means of other persons; sometimes of one Province, and sometimes of another."[11]

The political skill of the Massachusetts delegates, and especially of Samuel Adams, was recognized by Joseph Galloway, who spoke of the elder Adams as one who "eats little, drinks little, sleeps little, thinks much, and is most decisive and indefatigable in the pursuit of his objects."

On the sixteenth of September the Suffolk County Resolves, which had been framed by Joseph Warren, reached Philadelphia in the saddlebags of Paul Revere. The resolves declared that the Coercive Acts were unconstitutional and therefore need not be obeyed; advised the people of Massachusetts to arm; and recommended a policy of nonimportation against Great Britain. The arrival of the resolves presented the conservatives in Congress with a dilemma. They could not openly denounce them without aligning themselves with the ministry. On the other hand they went considerably further than the conservatives ever meant to go. They sat for the most part in unhappy silence while their more radical colleagues expressed "generous, noble sentiments and manly eloquence" in support of the resolves. Those who did venture to speak might as well have saved their breath, for the radicals rammed through a motion endorsing the resolves and then led a successful fight to have the arguments of their opponents stricken from the journal of Congress and the negative votes expunged from the record. Adams was delighted. That evening he wrote in his diary: "This was one of the happiest days of my life. . . . This day convinced me that America will support Massachusetts or perish with her."[12]

The painstaking notes that Adams took of the debates in Congress had a dual purpose. On the one hand there was the fact that the delegates were engaged in a great, historic act. They were making a fight for human liberty that would echo down through all the ages to come. There should thus be a record more complete than that represented by the brief entries in the journal of Congress. But there was a reason beyond this, a more immediate, more practical reason. In order to influence, to shape, guide and direct the deliberations of Congress along the course they should properly take, it was necessary to understand the men who composed it—their ideas, fears, prejudices, and, as far as possible, their motivations. To do that it was necessary to amass data—the relevant facts, views and opinions of the actors in the drama. It was God's prerogative to search the innermost recesses of the human heart. No man could entirely penetrate the mystery of another's personality. Yet, to a degree, one could develop the capacity to probe into the minds of men and discover "their secret passions, prejudices, habits, hopes, fears, wishes and designs, and by this means judge what part they will act in given circumstances for the future and see what principles and motives have actuated them to the conduct they have held in certain conjunctures of circumstances which are passed." It was this which led Adams to take careful notes on the debates in Congress, this and his ever present sense of history. "A dexterity and facility of thus unraveling men's thoughts and a faculty of governing them by means of the knowledge we have of them," he wrote Warren, "constitutes the principal part of the art of a politician."

On the narrower stage of a provincial assembly, where "a man's pedigree and biography, his education, profession and connections, as well as his fortune," were all known, it was easy enough to see what governed him and caused him to align himself with this party in preference to that, with one "system of politics rather than another." In Congress, Adams confessed, the problem was vastly more complicated. Without intimate knowledge of the background—"the characters and connections, the interests and views" of the various delegates—it was far more difficult to anticipate their reactions to the issues which passed before them. If it were not for the critical importance of the matters with which the delegates to Congress were concerned, Adams could have quite lost himself in the fascinating game—"an exquisite amusement, an high gratification of curiosity, this same mystery of politics." But the stakes were too great, and time too pressing, to allow Adams to indulge himself in a leisurely analysis of the character of John Jay or Joseph Galloway. He had to learn on the fly, by experience and close observation.[13]

Adams noted the eloquent ones who could move others with the power of their oratory—Lee, Henry, Hooper, Chase, "who speaks 'warmly'"; Mifflin, "a sprightly and spirited speaker"; Edward Rutledge, "young and zealous, a little unsteady and injudicious, but very unnatural and affected as a speaker"; Dyer and Sherman, who spoke "often and long, but very heavily and clumsily"; as well as the timid, the apathetic, the inarticulate and the "interested."

On September 22 the Committee for Stating Rights and Grievances brought in a report which was warmly debated. The issue lay between those who wanted to review the whole history of the colonies' relations with Great Britain from their first settling to the present moment and those who wished to confine the discussion to those specific rights which had been infringed by acts of Parliament since 1763, "postponing the further consideration of the general state of American rights to a future day." It being finally decided in favor of narrow construction, the committee took up the task of stating colonial rights and grievances since the Treaty of Paris, and Congress itself debated the best means of securing redress of grievances.

Richard Henry Lee promptly stated his preference for nonimportation. On this there was general agreement, the principal question being that of the timing of the announcement and the date it was to take effect. Samuel Chase of Maryland, pushing nonexportation as well, assured the delegates that "a total nonimportation and nonexportation to Great Britain and the West Indies must produce a national bankruptcy, in a very short space of time." He then proceeded to prove his point by a most convincing parade of statistics which showed, beyond reasonable doubt, that Great Britain would soon be brought to her knees. Lynch concurred. "If a firm policy of nonimportation and nonexportation is adopted I believe the Parliament would grant us immediate relief." The other Virginia delegates recoiled at the prospect of nonexportation. Involved in a one-crop economy and dependent for virtually all their income on the export of tobacco, they naturally balked. They would be called upon to shoulder more than their fair share. But the other Southern colonies failed to support their sister. Christopher Gadsden wanted the firmest measures. "The only way to prevent the sword from being used," he declared, "is to have it ready." He was for doing without the Virginians if necessary. Massachusetts could not hold out long without the firm support of the other colonies. "The country will be deluged in blood if we don't act with spirit. Don't let America look at this mountain and let it bring forth a mouse."[14] William Hooper of North Carolina joined Gadsden. His state supported itself by the export to Great Britain of naval stores; nonexportation would be as burdensome to his colony as to Virginia; he was supported, in turn, by Edward Rutledge. South Carolina had a great stable crop like Virginia. Rice and indigo were the basis of its export trade, products that went, as enumerated articles, only to England. But nonimportation and nonexportation were necessary if Great Britain was to be brought promptly to her senses. No halfway measures would serve. The other South Carolina delegates, however, could not face the sacrifice of both their basic crops; for a while Congress was deadlocked on the issue. Although Eliphalet Dyer of Connecticut stated dramatically: "We are struggling for the liberties of the West Indies and of the people of Great Britain, as well as our own, and perhaps of Europe," and the Massachusetts delegates stood solidly for nonimportation and nonexportation, the majority of the delegates wavered. Samuel Adams, John, Thomas Cushing and Paine were especially busy among their colleagues, trying to convert them to a policy of nonintercourse. If one or two colonies only held aloof, the system would collapse because merchants in neighboring colonies would not adhere to a prohibition that enriched their rivals as it impoverished them.

Thus the issue hung in the balance. It was, after all, asking a good deal of merchants in South Carolina, who felt no particular affinity for Yankees, to endure a drastic constriction of their commerce simply to save Boston from a punishment which, in the view of some at least, she had brought upon herself. It was one thing to agree on ringing pronouncements about the rights of Englishmen, and quite another to agree to severe sacrifices in the support of a group of leveling democrats. Adams' optimism suddenly seemed premature. A statement of rights without a plan of action to back it up would be worse than useless, for it would advertise to the world the impotence of the patriots. The British would smile condescendingly; the Tories would take heart. So there was obviously much to be done by the Massachusetts delegates if they were to ward off disaster. A firm policy must be adopted step by step. On the twenty-seventh of September the delegates agreed on nonimportation to take place after the first of December. But the next day Joseph Galloway took the floor at the opening of the session to present his own plan, a plan of union between the colonies under the British Crown.

This was the conservative counterattack, skillfully designed by its author to draw off the conservative and moderate members of Congress with the promise of a firmer and more rational union with the Mother Country. This plan was prefaced by a resolution that Congress should apply to His Majesty for a redress of grievances, assuring him that the colonies had no thought of independence. The plan itself called for a grand council, the legislative body elected by the respective colonial assemblies for three-year terms, and a president-general appointed by the Crown. The grand council should exercise "all the like rights, liberties and privileges as are held and exercised by and in the House of Commons of Great Britain," but it should still be "an inferior and distinct branch of the British legislature, united and incorporate with it," each having a veto power over the acts of the other.

Under Galloway's plan there would be two classes of law; those which concerned internal policy; and those involving more than one colony, such as raising money for war. In Galloway's view a complete nonexportation was impossible. "We, in this Province, should have tens of thousands of people thrown upon the cold hand of charity. Our ships would lie by the walls, our seamen would be thrown out of bread, our shipwrights, etc., out of employ, and it would affect the landed interest. . . . We must come upon terms with Great Britain," he declared.[15]

The speech was an eloquent and persuasive one. It seemed suddenly to offer hope to those who felt themselves borne along on a tide that had been set in motion and guided by the hand of Samuel Adams and his adherents. At the very least it meant delay and postponement, an opportunity to escape from a most painful, perhaps desperate dilemma; to avoid the stigma of treason and sedition.

James Duane was up at once to second the motion. He felt that Congress had gone far beyond its original purpose. The right of regulating trade could not possibly be exercised by the colonies. It was only logic and common sense to vest it expressly in Great Britain; Mr. Galloway's motion offered the only hope of genuine reconciliation.

Richard Henry Lee, sensing the dangers in the scheme, objected that it would so alter the existing governments of the colonies that he could not possibly agree to it without consulting his constituents. But to another member of the New York delegation, John Jay, it seemed eminently reasonable. It involved giving up no rights or privileges, it committed Congress to nothing that could compromise colonial liberty. It was rational, reasonable, well thought out; the British ministers would not dare to brush it aside.

Patrick Henry would have none of it. What, he asked, would be gained by liberating Americans from a corrupt Parliament only to submit them to a body which represented the individual colonists at third hand and which would be open, in turn, to corruption and manipulation?

Edward Rutledge of South Carolina considered it "almost a perfect plan," and Galloway took the floor again to argue that in every government there must be a supreme legislature. The regulation of trade must rest somewhere and it could in fact rest only in Parliament. Why, then, should the colonies not admit as much? "There is a necessity that an American legislature should be set up, or else that we should give the power to Parliament or King." It was as simple as that.

And so it seemed to an alarming number of the delegates. A clear majority defeated a motion to lay the Galloway plan aside, and Congress adjourned for noonday dinner in what, to the radicals, seemed a dismaying temper of compliance. Most of the delegates went to the day's grand feast at the mansion of Richard Penn, and Adams went from there to his lodgings where he spent the better part of the evening in an anxious consultation with Colonels Lee and Washington and Dr. Shippen.

A strategy must be devised at once to forestall the acceptance of the Galloway plan. Wavering and hesitant delegates must be subject to all the pressures that could be brought to bear. The Galloway plan must be killed in the egg before it could hatch confusion and division. So it was done the following day. In a perilously close vote of six states to five, the Galloway resolution was defeated and the mention of it expunged from the records. Yet the margin of victory was too close for comfort; the patriots caucused again on Thursday to try to secure their victory, and John wrote to Abigail that "patience, forbearance, long suffering" were the lessons that the Massachusetts delegates had had to learn. It became increasingly clear that, however much in accord the delegates might profess to be on political principles, they differed widely and stubbornly on the proper course of action. "I shall be killed with kindness in this place," he added. "We go to Congress at nine, and there we stay, most earnestly engaged in debates upon the most abstruse mysteries of state, until three in the afternoon; then we adjourn and go to dine with some of the nobles of Pennsylvania at four o'clock, and feast upon ten thousand delicacies, and sit drinking madeira, claret, and burgundy till six or seven, and then go home fatigued to death with business, company and care. Yet I hold out surprisingly."[16]

The next day, Friday, September 30, John came forward with his own motion, which began with the resolve that Massachusetts and the town of Boston "are now struggling in the common cause of American freedom, and, therefore, that it is the indispensable duty of all the colonies to support them by every necessary means, and to the last extremity." There followed another resolve enjoining nonexportation to Great Britain and finally the belligerent statement that any effort to arrest any person in Massachusetts Bay or any other colony for transport to England to stand trial for any crime whatsoever "ought to be considered as a declaration of war and a commencement of hostilities against all the colonies." The motion was read, debated briefly and put aside. It went, at least at the moment, considerably further than the majority of the delegates were willing to go.

In the first week of October the delegates debated extending the principle of nonimportation to the West Indies. The relatively mild motion to suspend importation of "molasses, coffee, or pimento, from the British plantations . . . or wines from Madeira and the western Islands, or foreign indigo" encountered strong opposition from such delegates as Samuel Chase of Maryland who were prepared to concede to England the right to regulate trade. Isaac Low argued that those who proposed the resolution had been "transported . . . by their zeal. . . . We have too much reason in this Congress, to suspect that independency is aimed at. . . . Will, can the people," Low asked, "bear a total interruption of the West India trade? Can they live without rum, sugar, and molasses? Will not their impatience and vexation defeat the measure?"[17]

The Committee on Colonial Rights and Grievances, of which the two Adamses were members, also brought in a "Declaration" early in October. It had been laboriously fashioned and represented a compromise between the radical and conservative elements in Congress. One of the prickliest points at issue had been whether to deny the right of Parliament to tax the colonies in all cases or simply their right to tax their trade *for revenue*. If the right of Parliament to lay a tariff on any colonial import was directly challenged, the Navigation Acts and the power of Parliament to regulate trade were, in effect, rejected and this meant going beyond the post-1763 actions of Parliament to call into question more than a century of established practice. On the other hand, a concession made of this central point would doubtless be interpreted by the British ministers as weakness, and if the right to regulate trade was specifically conceded, the colonists would find themselves again in the old dilemma of trying to distinguish between tariff for revenue and tariff for regulation, a weak and anomalous position at best.

At this point it was Adams' inspiration to state the right of the colonial legislatures over "all cases of taxation and internal polity," and then to add that, "from the necessity of the case, and a regard to the mutual interest of both countries, we cheerfully consent to the operation of such acts of the British Parliament, as are *bona fide*, restrained to the regulation of our external commerce . . . excluding every idea of taxation, internal or external, for raising a revenue on the subjects in America, without their consent." That seemed to serve the purpose very well. It let the Navigation Acts lie undisturbed while asserting in unmistakable terms the principle of colonial autonomy.

The balance of the declaration enumerated the colonial rights and grievances in detail: the colonists were entitled to "life, liberty and property," the great Lockean trinity, to all the "rights, liberties and immunities of free and natural-born subjects, with the realm of England"; to the power over the purse, vested in the colonial assemblies; to trial by a jury of "peers of the vicinage"; to the right of peaceable assembly and of petition; to be free of an army quartered upon them. Then followed a list of particular acts of Parliament that were adjudged "infringements and violations of the rights of the colonists." The repeal of these unlawful acts by Parliament was necessary "in order to restore harmony between Great Britain and the American colonies," and the means by which repeal was to be hastened was through the various colonies entering into "a nonimportation, nonconsumption, and nonexportation agreement or association."

On October 7, Adams found time to write to Abigail. Apologizing for the infrequency of his letters, he reminded her that he had had "the characters and tempers, the principles and views, of fifty gentlemen, total strangers to me, to study, and the trade, policy and whole interest of a dozen provinces to learn, when I came here." In addition he had had "multitudes of pamphlets, newspapers and private letters to read. I have numberless plans of policy and many arguments to consider, I have many visits to make and receive, much ceremony to endure, which cannot be avoided, which, you know, I hate." He found "a great spirit" in Congress, and admonished Abigail to encourage the Braintree militia to "exercise every day in the week if they will, the more the better. Let them furnish themselves with artillery, arms and ammunition. Let them follow the maxim which you say they had adopted, 'In times of peace prepare for war.' But let them avoid war *if possible—if possible*, I say." Abigail must depend upon Paul Revere for more detailed news about the activities of Congress.[18]

While the declaration was debated, the radicals took heart from the Pennsylvania elections, which returned John Dickinson, Mifflin and Charles Thomson by great majorities to the Assembly and thereby damped the fires of the Galloway faction and the Quakers. The Massachusetts delegation lobbied for approval by the Congress of their colony resuming the old provincial charter, abrogated in 1690, but found the delegates unwilling to endorse such an extralegal measure and equally unwilling to recommend that the Bay colony set up "a new form of government" of their own. The "secret hope" that Congress would advise "offensive measures," Adams wrote William Tudor, was groundless. The delegates would not "at this session vote to raise men or money, or arms or ammunition. Their opinions are fixed against hostilities and ruptures, except they should become absolutely necessary, and this necessity they do not yet see." The delegates dreaded above everything else separation from Great Britain. They recoiled from any act which would "light up the flames of war perhaps through the whole continent, which might rage for twenty year[s], and end in the subduction of America, as likely as in her liberation."

Sunday, Adams, in a bold and venturesome mood, went to a "Romish chapel." He was astonished at his temerity and surprised at the power of the service. Deeply sensuous, he was moved too strongly by the beauty of the liturgy for his own comfort. Although he wrote primly and disapprovingly to Abigail of "the poor wretches fingering their beads" and "chanting Latin, not a word of which they understood," of the crossings and bowings, kneelings and genuflectings, of "the images, paintings, crucifixes, velvet, gold and above all of the picture of Christ in a marble frame above the altar . . . a full length, upon the cross in His agonies, and the blood dropping and streaming from His wounds," he found the sermon a sensible discourse on the duties of parents to their children and was quite carried away with the music, "exquisitely soft and sweet." Indeed, he wrote Tudor, "I am amazed that Luther and Calvin were ever able to break the charm and dissolve the spell."[19]

Oscillating, as usual, between hope and gloom, John wrote to Abigail, while things dragged on inconclusively in Congress, "I am wearied to death with the life I lead. The business of the Congress is tedious beyond expression. This assembly is like no other that ever existed. Every man in it is a great man, an orator, a critic, a statesman; and therefore every man upon every question must show his oratory, his criticism, and his political abilities. The consequence of this is that business is drawn and spun out to an immeasurable length. I believe if it was moved and seconded that three and two make five, we should be entertained with logic and rhetoric, law, history, politics, and mathematics, and then—we should pass the resolution unanimously in the affirmative."[20]

After the passage of the Declaration of Rights and Grievances, Adams with Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Johnson of Maryland, John Rutledge and Patrick Henry was named to a committee to draw up a petition to His Majesty. It was John's first contact with Henry and the Virginia orator impressed him as having more zeal than knowledge. By Henry's own admission, he had little education and little regard for learning, but he had "high notions" of liberty, was a little inclined to cant, and impatient with those delegates who lacked his own ardor.

While Adams and his committee labored over the humble petition, the delegates continued to wrangle over the question of the right of Parliament to regulate colonial trade. On October 13 the division was five colonies pro, five con, and two divided. A week later, with the issue still unresolved, a formal Association was adopted by Congress. The Association summarized the principal grievance—that "ruinous system of colonial administration, adopted by the British ministry about the year 1763, evidently calculated for enslaving these colonies, and with them, the British Empire"—and then went on to spell out the means by which the colonies should seek redress. Nonimportation from Great Britain, Ireland, or the British West Indies was to start in December. The slave trade should be suspended as of that date and the colonists must pledge themselves to be "neither concerned in it ourselves," nor to rent vessels or sell commodities to those who were so involved.

Nonexportation was to be delayed a year, until September 1775, whereupon, if Parliament had not repealed the objectionable statutes, it would go into full force against Great Britain and her possessions. Other articles of the Association spelled out the means by which the agreement was to be imposed and supervised. The most important single article recommended that a committee, an "Association," be formed "in every county, city and town by those who are qualified to vote for representatives in the legislature, whose business it shall be attentively to observe the conduct of all persons touching this Association." Those who violated it were to be publicly denounced as "the enemies of American liberty," and ostracized.

These Associations were, in effect, extralegal, revolutionary bodies. The earlier Committees of Correspondence had served primarily as a channel for spreading information, and as the nucleus of patriotic organization. The Associations carried things an important step further;

they constituted agencies for enforcing the illegal resolutions of Congress.

With the recommendation for the Associations, the principal work of the delegates was accomplished. The members met at the City Tavern to attend a most elegant entertainment at the invitation of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania. There in a general spirit of good-fellowship and conviviality the toast was given and heartily applauded, "May the sword of the parent never be stained with the blood of her children!" At this toast, two abstemious Quakers in broad-brimmed hats who sat opposite Adams said cheerily, "This is not a toast, but a prayer; come, let us join in it," and they took up their glasses accordingly.

The two items of business that remained were the petition to the King, "the address to the people of Great Britain, and the memorial to the inhabitants of British America." But here Congress encountered unexpected difficulties and delays. Adams noted in his diary four days later, "In Congress, nibbling and quibbling as usual. There is no greater mortification than to sit with a half a dozen wits, deliberating upon a petition, address or memorial. These great wits, these subtle critics, these refined geniuses, these learned lawyers, these wise statesmen, are so fond of showing their parts and powers, as to make their consultations very tedious." Ned Rutledge behaved like "a perfect Bob o' Lincoln—a swallow—a sparrow—a peacock; excessively vain, excessively weak, and excessively variable and unsteady," from which it may be safely concluded that he opposed John Adams. Even John Dickinson appeared "delicate and timid," until John was quite beside himself with impatience.[21]

His desire to be off for home was increased by Abigail, who wrote in a vein that made Philadelphia's social life empty and unsatisfying and the deliberations of Congress unbearably tedious: "My much beloved friend—I dare not express to you, at three hundred miles' distance, how ardently I long for your return. I have some very miserly wishes, and cannot consent to your spending one hour [in Boston] till, at least, I have had you twelve. The idea plays about my heart, unnerves my hand, whilst I write; awakens all the tender sentiments that years have increased and matured. . . . The whole collected stock of ten weeks' absence knows not how to brook any longer restraint, but will break forth and flow through my pen." Abigail enclosed letters from Nabby and Johnny; Johnny, aged seven, had been working since his departure to learn to write his father a legible letter. Now he apologized for his shaky penmanship. "Mamma says you will accept my endeavors, and that my duty to you may be expressed in poor writing as well as good. I hope I grow a better boy and that you will have no occasion to be ashamed of me when you return. Mr. Thaxter says I learn my books very well. He is a very good master. I read my books to Mamma. We all long to see you. I am, sir, your dutiful son." The longing was reciprocated. John yearned to be gone.[22]

Finally, it was done. The King was petitioned with suitable humility but unmistakable firmness and the inhabitants of British America were exhorted to support the colonial cause. Congress adjourned, agreeing if need be to meet again in May of the next year, and Adams and his fellow delegates took their leave "in a very great rain, from the happy, the peaceful, the elegant, the hospitable, and polite city of Philadelphia." He did not expect to see that part of the world again but he carried away delightful memories of good food and good companionship. As for the cause, there had been much labor and no small profit. The conservatives had failed completely in their effort to forestall effective action. If Congress had not gone as far as Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, Charles Thomson, Richard Henry Lee and, indeed, John himself would have liked, it had gone a good deal further than many members had wished to go, and, most important of all, the appearance of colonial unity had been preserved. The Massachusetts politicians had done their work well. They had observed Joseph Hawley's injunction to be tactful, moderate and reserved, to respect the diversity of the delegates from the other colonies, to transcend provincialism and suppress those prejudices which were often all too natural to the New Englander with his conscious sense of rectitude and feeling of moral and intellectual superiority.

Adams had been genuinely moved as well as profoundly irritated by the proceedings of Congress. The cause must rest, ultimately, on the trust and confidence of men from various colonies in each other. It was a fragile framework to hold the timbers of what might, in the course of time, become a new nation. With innumerable divisions and mutual antagonisms, often of several generations' standing, to divide them, they had only their devotion to an abstract principle to unite them. At Philadelphia, the delegates from twelve colonies had met and assessed each other, found a basis for common action, made friends, and in making friends had in fact cemented the union. For Massachusetts it had been the moment of decision, perilous in the extreme. When the delegates had been called to Philadelphia it was far from certain that their deliberations would be favorable to the Bay colony. The most assiduous maneuvering by that master of practical politics, Samuel Adams, had defeated the Galloway proposals by the vote of one colony. By so thin a thread hung the life, so to speak, of Massachusetts, of the town of Boston, and of colonial unity.

Notwithstanding all this, a curious air of unreality hung over the debates of the Congress. The great majority of the radicals concealed from themselves the full implications of their actions with the comforting assurance that Britain *must* comply with the colonial demands or face bankruptcy and ruin. The conservatives, it might be argued, were far more realistic in their appraisal of the crisis. They were not deluded by hopes that a handful of remote colonies would make a penitent beggar of the greatest nation in the world. If they recoiled, or hung back, it might be that it was because they foresaw the outcome more clearly. But whatever the tensions and conflicts within the patriot ranks, they had by skillful management and by a spirit of concession been hidden from the world behind a façade of intercolonial unity. Even Joseph Galloway had voted for the Declaration of Rights and Grievances and the Articles of Association.

XV

AVOIDING, wherever they could, the festivities planned for them on their homeward journey, John Adams and his Massachusetts fellow delegates hastened north. Adams noted, as they paused in New York, that the Sons of Liberty were "in the horrors here," much discouraged at the growth of loyalism and neutrality in the city. Elsewhere their progress was marked by encouraging indications of patriotic zeal, but all John's thoughts ran ahead to Braintree. He had been gone three months, by far the longest period of separation from Abigail since their marriage ten years before. His desire to be with her and with the children, to walk the Braintree meadows and ride the hills was as sharp and insistent as physical pain.

The reunion was a joyful one—Nabby, always a little shy and reserved but full of kisses for papa; Johnny with his bright, expressive face, impetuous and headlong like his father; Charles, a charming four-year-old; and Tommy, the baby, rosy and chubby, pretty as a picture. But Abigail, above all, Abigail, what was he to say of her? She was a little plumper but delightfully so, pink with pleasure and excitement, and dressed most fetchingly. She was especially proud of her superintendence of the farm. Although it was late autumn, everything was neat as a pin, the fields turned and manured and the lower pasture covered with seaweed hauled from the shore. She had been a faithful stewardess of their brood and property.

Outside of Boston, tightly in the grip of the British soldiers, the country was like a camp. In Braintree, the common echoed with military commands: "Right by files, files right, shoulder firelocks, foorrwaard maarch, hup two, hup two, hup two," as earnest farmers wheeled and turned, marched and countermarched, simulated loading their muskets and aiming at imaginary redcoats. Adams, watching the maneuvers with pride, was convinced that, if the occasion ever required, the colony could put an army of fifteen thousand men in the field in one week. But beyond this, the Province, without formal government or law, suffered in many ways. Business was at a virtual standstill, debtors could not pay their debts and creditors, conversely, could not collect a shilling on the pound. "Imagine," Adams wrote to one of his new Philadelphia friends, "four hundred thousand people without government or law, forming themselves in companies for various purposes, of justice, policy, and war! You must allow for a great deal of the ridiculous, much of the melancholy, and some of the marvelous."[1]

Upon his return from the Continental Congress Adams was promptly re-elected by the town to serve in the Provincial Congress. There was, in fact, little that the Congress could do but issue proclamations and resolutions. If Massachusetts was to resist the efforts of Great Britain to discipline her, she must develop her own manufacturing enterprises so that she would not be dependent on English imports. Congress thus recommended to the people that their mutton be spared to provide wool; that flax and hemp be raised; nails, steel, tin plate firearms, salt, buttons, paper and stockings be manufactured in the colony. Adams' counsel was to avoid any act that might lead to violence and thereby make reconciliation impossible. The death of a single British soldier might carry things beyond retrieving. Heartened by rumors from England that the American grievances would be redressed, he urged firmness tempered by patience and moderation.

While the Provincial Congress sat to no great purpose except as a symbol of the colony's determination to resist, a Tory spokesman with the pen name of Massachusettensis began a series of essays in the Boston *Post Boy* attacking the patriot position with considerable skill. Massachusettensis was in fact Daniel Leonard, a friend of Adams' and an able lawyer. Adams, who assumed that Jonathan Sewall was the author, described the articles as "well written," abounding "with wit . . . good information . . . and subtlety of art and address wonderfully calculated to keep up the spirits of their party, to depress ours, to spread intimidation and to make proselytes among those whose principles and judgment give way to their fears." Since these were, by John's estimation, "at least one third of mankind" he felt it a matter of considerable importance to refute the glib and artful Massachusettensis before his poison spread and gave a pretext for neutrality to those who dreaded action.

For his rebuttal, Adams chose the pen name Novanglus—New England—and his articles over that name began to appear in the Boston *Gazette* at the end of January 1775. *Novanglus* fell into two parts; the first, historical and polemic, reviewed the events leading up to the calling of the Continental Congress. It was a detailed if thoroughly partisan account of the conflict between Great Britain in the person of its colonial representatives and the Bay colony, and exhibited Adams' mastery of such disputation. The second part was a lawyer's brief in support of the colonial, or more particularly of Massachusetts', resistance to the authority of Parliament. It was closely reasoned, studded with citations from relevant cases in the common law and weighted with constitutional precedents.

Novanglus was the most learned and laborious statement of the strictly constitutional grounds for colonial resistance. Written in answer to the ablest argument by a colonial apologist for the Mother Country, it may be taken to carry the burden of the colonial cause. If there was some supreme judiciary, mundane or divine, before which the principal actors in the dispute between *Great Britain* versus *English* America might be called to present their respective viewpoints, the American case could find no better spokesman. The point is worth emphasizing since, as Adams was well aware, posterity is a stern, unsleeping and frequently blind judge of the past.

Modern historians have said that the Americans had no real case for their resistance to Parliament; that the colonial case was faulty in reason and in law, merely a series of tenuous and tendentious rationalizations after the fact. John Adams would have smiled wryly at the twentieth-century scholars' acceptance of Massachusettensis' contention that the colonists had initially (at the passage of the Stamp Act) denied the right of Parliament to impose internal taxes but conceded its right to impose external taxes or tariffs; and further that when the ministry had responded to this sophistry by passing the Townshend duties, the colonists had at once—so Massachusettensis argued—shifted to the position that Parliament could levy a tariff to regulate trade but not for the purpose of raising a revenue (since this would be taxation without representation). Daniel Leonard's thesis in the mouths of scholars today has made a shambles of the patriots' argument that they were motivated by principle—and, as a consequence, of the view that the American Revolution had anything to do with freedom. It thus follows that, if we are to take seriously those things which John Adams and his fellow patriots most solemnly declared to be their motivations, we must penetrate at least a little way into the thicket of Adams' lengthy disquisition.

He set out, quite loftily, "to speak out the whole truth boldly, but use no bad language," a pledge which apparently did not exclude vigorous invective. His primary purpose was to "show the wicked policy of the Tories"; to trace their plan "from its first rude sketches to its present complete draft," and to vindicate the motives and actions of the Whigs—the patriots. Massachusettensis had opened his assault with the accusation that the resistance of the Bay colony to Great Britain had been the work of a few agitators, "popular leaders" who had misled the ignorant populace by reminding them "of the elevated rank they hold in the universe, as men; that all men by nature are equal; that kings are but the ministers of the people; that their authority is delegated to them by the people, for their good, and they have a right to resume it, and place it in other hands, or keep it themselves, whenever it is made use of to oppress them." By such dangerous and inflammatory declarations the popular leaders had, Massachusettensis maintained, gulled the poor public. To this charge Adams replied that in all of history no popular leaders, "uninvested with other authority than what is conferred by the popular suffrage," had ever been able "to persuade a large people, for any length of time together, to think themselves wrong, injured and oppressed, unless they really were, and saw and felt it to be so." Moreover, those very declarations on the nature of government which Massachusettensis professed to scorn were "what are called revolution principles," the principles "of Aristotle and Plato, of Livy and Cicero, and Sidney, Harrington and Locke; the principles of nature and eternal reason; the principles on which the whole government over us now stands." It was astonishing that any writer should be "so indiscreet, so immodest, as to insinuate a doubt concerning them." They were proudly acknowledged to be the root and branch of the colonial cause.

Adams then proceeded to trace the Tories through their "dark intrigues and wicked machinations . . . for enslaving this country." The installments that followed showed, to the author's satisfaction at least, that Bernard, Hutchinson, Oliver and their cohorts had, from the first, been prepared to sacrifice particular colonial liberties for the more efficient functioning of the imperial system and greater revenues for the Crown. Starting with Bernard's *Principles of Law and Polity* written in 1764, which recommended a "general reformation of the American governments," Adams pointed out that they adumbrated the system which the ministry in fact soon adopted. From the beginning the hinge on which the whole dispute turned could be simply enough stated: the ministry insisted that "Parliament is the only supreme, sovereign, absolute and uncontrollable legislative over all the colonies," while the colonists for their part held fast to the view that "Parliament has no authority over them, excepting to regulate their trade, and this not by any principle of common law, but merely by the consent of the colonies, founded on the obvious necessity . . . of the case."

By what law, Adams asked, did Parliament have authority over America? It was answered, "By the law of God, in the Old and New Testament, it has none; by the law of nature and nations, it has none; by the common law of England, it has none, for the common law and the authority of Parliament founded on it never extended beyond the four seas; by statute law it has none, for no statute was made before the settlement of the colonies for this purpose; and the Declaratory Act, made in 1766, was made without our consent." Great Britain, if she would make the colonies subordinate to Parliament, must do it by "the law of brickbats and cannon balls, which can be answered only by brickbats and balls."

Against Massachusettensis' contention that the colonies could not possibly stand against the armed might of the Mother Country, Adams replied that although there was no real chance that "the nation should be so sunk in sloth, luxury, and corruption, as to suffer [Grenville] to persevere in his mad blunders," the colonists in such a case could very well defend and supply themselves with the sinews of war. "The plausible Massachusettensis may write as he will, but in a land war this continent might defend itself against all the world. We have men enough, and those men have as good natural understandings and as much natural courage as any other men."

As to the argument that Americans should bear their fair share of the expenses of the British government through taxation, Adams pointed out that through their trade they brought a larger revenue into the coffers of the nation than all the rest of the British Empire put together. In trying to extract a wretched tax, the British might kill the goose that laid golden eggs.

Massachusettensis had touched a sensitive nerve by charging that the Whigs were actually seeking independence of Great Britain under the guise of struggling for their "rights." If he meant by independence "an independent republic in America or a confederation of independent republics," no accusation could be "a more wicked or a greater slander on the Whigs," because the writer knew in his own heart that "there is not a man in the province among the Whigs, nor ever was, who harbors a wish of that sort. . . . The Whigs acknowledge a subordination to the King, in as strict and strong a sense as the Tories. The Whigs acknowledge a voluntary subordination to Parliament, as far as the regulation of trade."

Here, again, in the patriots' acceptance of subordination to the King lay another trap in which Massachusettensis sought to ensnare them. If they professed allegiance to the Crown, they in fact placed themselves under the authority of Parliament, for the Crown, in its true meaning, comprehended Parliament as well as the royal ministers and officials. To this insidious argument Adams addressed much attention. The colonists owed their loyalty and subordination to the King in his own person, not in his political embodiment as the state; to the "person of the King, not to his crown"; to "his natural, not his politic capacity." He rummaged through all of English history, through feudal and common law, to find instances of countries which had acknowledged the authority of the King but not that of Parliament. Wales and Ireland were particular instances and Novanglus outlined in detail the nature of the ties which bound those states to the English monarch. Involved also was the question of whether the colonies were part of the realm of Great

Britain or whether they were outside the realm; whether the Mother Country claimed dominion over them by right of conquest or by colonization. To Adams the colonies were clearly outside the realm and he mustered an array of constitutional precedents to support his position. It was equally clear that they in no sense constituted conquered territory. It was by royal charter that the colonies had been established; they had never formally accepted the authority of Parliament and that body had no right to impose its will upon British America. The truth was that "the people of England were depraved, the Parliament venal, and the ministry corrupt."

Massachusettensis had singled out the Committee of Correspondence for his strictures as "the foulest, subtlest, and most venomous serpent that ever issued from the eggs of sedition," but Adams defended the organization vigorously. "Almost all mankind," he wrote, "have lost their liberties through ignorance, inattention, and disunion. These committees are admirably calculated to diffuse knowledge, to communicate intelligence, and promote unanimity." History manifested countless examples of struggles for liberty that had come to nothing because lack of communication allowed the champions of freedom to be destroyed in detail by the forces of despotism. "The patriots of this Province," Adams declared, "desire nothing new; they wish only to keep their old privileges. For one hundred and fifty years they had been allowed to tax themselves and govern their internal concerns as they thought best. Parliament governed their trade as they thought fit. This plan they wish may continue forever."

If the colonists were sincere in their complaint of taxation without representation, Massachusettensis had asked, why did they not seek representation in Parliament? The colonial answer to this was simple enough: the colonies could not be represented in Parliament in numbers sufficient to give them a controlling voice in their own affairs. Token representation would merely deprive them of their strongest constitutional argument.

Adams' conclusion was that "the fealty and allegiance of Americans . . . is undoubtedly due to the person of King George III, whom God long preserve and prosper. It is due to him in his natural person . . . because, by the charters, and other express and implied contracts made between the Americans and the kings of England, they have bound themselves to fealty and allegiance to the natural person of that prince, who shall rightfully hold the kingly office in England."

The "noblemen and ignoblemen [of England]," Adams concluded, "ought to have considered that Americans understand the laws and politics as well as themselves, and that there are six hundred thousand men in it, between sixteen and sixty years of age; and therefore it will be very difficult to chicane them out of their liberties by 'fictions of law' . . . no matter upon what foundation."

The colonies were neither part of "the English realm, dominions, state, empire, call it what you will," or corporations, or conquered territory, or annexed lands. Thus Parliament could assert no lawful claim on their subordination.

Most of the *Novanglus Papers* were published through the late winter and spring of 1775. While British troops occupied Boston and the Provincial Congress sat at Cambridge, word came that the newly elected Parliament was as hostile to American liberties as the old. The ministers showed no sign of relenting, the merchants raised no clamor, the people of Great Britain were hardened in their resolution to chastise the Province of Massachusetts Bay. It seemed as though the whole colony, Tory and Whig alike, held its collective breath waiting for the spark that would ignite the dry tinder. James Warren wrote to John Adams, "Now is the time, the exact crisis, to determine the point, and the sooner the better."[2]

The last of the *Novanglus Papers* were never published. On April 19, 1775, a regiment of redcoats marched out to Lexington and Concord to confiscate a cache of colonial powder. Upon the Lexington common, the militia stood fast and shots were exchanged. The minutemen swarmed around the British soldiers at Concord and dogged their retreat to Boston. Painstaking legal arguments became suddenly obsolete. The question of which party to the dispute was right in a legal or constitutional sense is, of course, a question of secondary importance. The judgment of posterity might be that the colonists indeed had no respectable case for their resistance to the authority of the Mother Country exercised through Parliament. Certainly the vast majority of eighteenth-century Englishmen were confident that they did not. It is this writer's view, as it was John Adams', that they did. Beyond doubt, in the broader context of abstract human rights, the colonies were faced with the infringement of basic rights of self-government to which they had grown accustomed and which they were determined to maintain. We may understand and indeed to a degree sympathize with the British point of view while recognizing at the same time that they were rigid, doctrinaire, shortsighted and even, in a way, morally wrong in pursuing the course that they did. By a simple pragmatic test, they were wrong: they lost a rich and productive empire and alienated for many years a people whose proudest claim had been to call themselves Englishmen. Law is a means by which men seek to accommodate themselves to each other and thereby live in order and harmony. When that harmony and the mutual sympathy supporting it break down, it makes little difference where the masters of jurisprudence place precise weight of statute and precedent.

What is important to us about the legal and constitutional arguments is that they were supremely important to the colonists themselves. They could act with a good conscience only if they were convinced that they acted in accord with the letter of the highest law as well as of the lowest. They must be able to rely on Scripture, on Sidney, Locke and Harrington, and finally on Coke, Mansfield, Bacon and the laws and statutes of the realm, in roughly that order. As long as we look to the American Revolution as the incubator of ideals and values which remain viable in our national life, we must take seriously and indeed accept as "right" those principles for which, by their own testimony, the Revolutionary generation took up arms.

While Adams scribbled away at the *Novanglus Papers,* the town of Braintree held a meeting to elect a representative to the Provincial Assembly for the winter term. Deacon Joseph Palmer of Germantown was chosen in place of John. James Warren was indignant; even "a small degree of patriotism"[3] in Braintree Township should have insured his return. Adams, in reply, assured his friend that the town had done the right thing in choosing Palmer, who had been "for some time in the center of all their business in the county, town and Province." Half Bostonian, Adams had not attended a Braintree town meeting for eight years and had indeed been averse to being chosen. As soon as the issue with Great Britain was settled he was determined to withdraw from politics. "I have neither fortune, leisure, health, nor genius for it. . . . I cannot help putting my hand to the pump, now the ship is in a storm and the hold full of water; but as soon as she gets into a calm, and a place of safety, I must leave her." For himself he was hopeful that civil war would break out in England between the government and the oppressed people of that country before it touched the colonies. The people of Braintree grew constantly more resolute. A town meeting had voted to raise three companies of minutemen and had ratified the Congressional Association as well as the resolutions of the Provincial Congress. There were rumors that the ministry was sending forty thousand Russian soldiers, twenty-thousand British and Irish troops, sixteen capital ships and a thousand smaller vessels to patrol American waters, but steady men knew better.

XVI

WORD OF THE "Battle of Lexington" reached John and Abigail in Braintree. Like many others, they felt a sense of relief. This must draw things to some conclusion. Americans everywhere must surely understand that the time had passed for equivocation, for humble petitions and false hopes. Massachusetts had stood firm, had been patient and resolute under extreme provocation. Soldiers had made an excursion into the peaceful countryside, American blood and British blood had been spilled—the issue was joined. America if it could not be free under Britain would be independent.

Three days after the skirmish John rode up to Cambridge and saw "the New England army" in wild confusion. Without uniforms or equipment, without guns or powder, without food or proper shelter, they huddled in improvised shelters and lean-tos on the common, foraged for rations, drilled and drilled. This was no rabble, but Adams reflected ruefully on their unmilitary manner and appearance. Privates called their officers, who in most instances they had elected from among their own numbers, by first names, obeyed or disregarded orders as they were inclined, appeared in all manner of dress and undress, and otherwise gave very little indication of being the sinews of an army of liberty. But Adams took heart from the high spirits of the citizen soldiers who professed themselves ready to drive the redcoats into Boston Harbor. From Cambridge, after surveying the encampment and talking to his friend, formerly Dr., now General Warren, John, as curious and excited as a boy, made his way over the route the British soldiers had taken to Lexington. With the banners of spring unfurling around him, he rode along the muddy roads almost as far as Concord, turning into farms to get firsthand accounts of the retreat, savoring every detail of how the arrogant soldiers had marched out, drumming and tootling defiance, only to come reeling back hours later, shaken and exhausted, bearing their dead and wounded with them. These were the finest soldiers in the world, English soldiers, of whom it could be said, if one was not inclined to quibble, that they had fled from the farmers of Middlesex County. Adams experienced exhilaration as he imagined the scene. He would have given a great deal if on that day he could have been behind one of the stone fences taking aim at a British soldier as coolly as if the redcoat were a woodcock or a ruffled grouse.

Back in Braintree he gave Abigail a complete account of the engagement. It was the perfect occasion of war: the mercenary soldiers of a despotic government firing on citizens who were defending their homes and families; the embattled farmers giving better than they took; the British angry and discomforted, prisoners in the city they had so grandly occupied not many months before. The excitement helped to lay Adams low with a fever and "alarming symptoms." Congress was reassembling in a few weeks at Philadelphia, and the wretched illness threatened to keep him confined at Braintree. He was beside himself with impatience. It seemed as though history, at the most dramatic moment of all, was about to leave him in the quiet eddy of a country town. The other delegates, this time including John Hancock in place of James Bowdoin, set out without him. But he was determined to go even if it should kill him; two days later Abigail, having nursed him through the worst of his sickness, gave way reluctantly and sent him off in a sulky with young Joseph Bass to look after him, along with a cake from her mother, her father's mare for Bass to ride, and endless admonitions about taking his medicines and guarding what there was of health to guard. Although she tried to be "very insensible and heroic" as he rode off, her heart, she confessed, "felt like a heart of lead."[1]

The trip revived John. He found Bass an entertaining companion, "very clever, sober, discreet," and the two travelers pressed on so rapidly that they overtook the other delegates at Hartford. Again the group was met everywhere by large crowds of patriots who rode out to welcome them from the towns along the way and escorted them to the local tavern to feast, to hear innumerable toasts and give the latest news of Boston. "We are treated with great tenderness, sympathy, friendship, and respect. I have no doubts now of the union," he wrote to Abigail.[2] The news from all sides was heartening. The Tories in New York did not dare to show their heads. New Jersey was roused and Connecticut was raising six thousand men. In Hartford John bought some military books and promised that he could instruct his brothers Elihu and Peter Boylston in that science if they were disposed to take commands in the army.[3]

As Adams rode south with his fellows, his "beloved Boston" was constantly on his mind. "It is arrogance and presumption in human sagacity," he wrote to his wife, "to pretend to penetrate far into the designs of Heaven. The most perfect reverence and resignation becomes us." But John could not help speculating that the suffering of Boston was the price God exacted for binding the colonies together "in more indissoluble bonds. . . . It will plead with all America with more irresistible persuasion than angels trumpet-tongued." He assured Abigail that she was in no peril at Braintree but warned her in the case of real danger "to fly to the woods with our children."

Approaching New York City, John's mare, already galled by her harness, took fright, overturning the sulky with Joseph Bass in it and then bolted, dragging along behind her the smashed carriage. Adams was forced to abandon the sulky, place his baggage in Thomas Cushing's chaise, buy a saddle and ride on horseback with Bass for the remainder of the journey. The New York militia, well armed and smart in appearance, turned out to greet them, and most of the city seemed to have poured into Broadway to welcome them. The enthusiasm of that Province for the cause was most reassuring: "Our prospect of a union in the colonies is promising indeed," he wrote Abigail. "Never was there such a spirit." Yet Adams was anxious because "there is always more smoke than fire—more noise than music."[4]

The delegates were in Philadelphia by the tenth of May. Once there, John, who had been buoyed up by the stimulus of the trip, suffered a sharp relapse. His eyes were so sore and inflamed that he could neither read nor write without great pain.

When Congress convened there were "a number of new and very ingenuous faces," among them James Wilson, a thickset, florid, nearsighted lawyer from Pennsylvania, and John Langdon, a wealthy New Hampshire patriot. The most famous addition was the great Dr. Benjamin Franklin, home from England: scientist, moralizer, hedonist, self-made man of a hundred talents, one of the first figures of the age. Adams soon came to feel that the author of *Poor Richard's Almanac*, while "a great and good man . . . composed and grave . . . very reserved," and very steady in the cause of liberty, was not at all the equal of his fellow Pennsylvanian, James Wilson, "in fortitude, rectitude and abilities."[5]

Colonel Washington was back, this time in the handsome blue and buff uniform of a Virginia militia officer. Washington, John wrote, "by his great experience and abilities in military matters is of much service to us."[6] John Hancock took Peyton Randolph's place as president of Congress and Charles Thomson continued his duties as secretary.

In the days before he set out for Congress Adams had spent much time with Major Hawley, James Otis, James and Joseph Warren discussing the manner in which Massachusetts might establish a government of its own and, in so doing, push the other colonies in the direction of independence. Soon after Congress met, a letter from the Provincial Convention of Massachusetts was placed before the delegates asking congressional sanction for what in effect would be a revolutionary government. Congress was at once in a fever of apprehension and Adams raised its temperature further by a fiery speech in which he urged that, the sword having been drawn, the scabbard should be thrown away. The case of Massachusetts was the most urgent, "but . . . it could not be long before every other colony must follow her example." Knowing this, Adams had undertaken to investigate ancient and modern confederacies "for examples." Other confederated governments seemed to have been thrown together hastily by a few leaders. The opportunity facing the American colonies was a unique one. The people of the colonies, people "of more intelligence, curiosity, and enterprise" than history could show, must all be consulted. The delegates must give form to the theories of "the wisest writers and invite the people to erect the whole building with their own hands, upon the broadest foundation." This could be done "only by conventions of representatives chosen by the people of the several colonies." Congress should at once recommend "to the people of every colony to call such conventions . . . and set up governments of their own, under their own authority; for the people were the source of all authority and [origin] of all power."

Adams' proposal was far too extreme for the temper of the majority of the delegates and it was ordered "to lie on the table." The furthest Congress would go, and that reluctantly, was to authorize Massachusetts to organize an assembly and "exercise the powers of government, until a Governor of His Majesty's appointment will consent to govern the colony according to its charter."

In spite of Lexington and Concord, Adams found, as he had in the first Congress, a strong suspicion of the New Englanders. The Pennsylvanians, in particular, suspected them of seeking independence, "an American republic; Presbyterian principles, and twenty other things," and as before the Massachusetts delegates found that with their constituents at war in all but name they must move with the greatest circumspection. It was a nerve-racking game, complicated for Adams by the state of his health and nerves. At first, encouraged by the reception that he and his fellow Massachusetts delegates had received on their arrival at Philadelphia, he had overestimated the resolution of the majority of the delegates and spoken too freely in Congress and out. Indeed, in one of his impassioned harangues he had seen "horror, terror, and detestation, strongly marked on the countenances of some of the members."

Clearly, one of the first problems facing Congress was the question of a commander-in-chief for the army at Boston. Old General Artemus Ward was hardly the man to command the continental forces. The odd-looking and eccentric Charles Lee, an English officer who had offered his services to the colonial cause and whose tales of his own prowess had impressed many of the delegates, Adams among them, was a serious candidate. John Hancock, who fancied himself a bold and skillful soldier, was, at least in his own view, another. Certainly in point of services to the patriot cause Hancock had a greater claim than any of the other leading prospects.

Congress, despite a surface harmony, was like any such body, made up of conflicting interests and ambitions. John felt constantly the danger of a Southern and a Northern party. If such an alignment were imposed on the even more fundamental split between moderate and radical, Congress might become fragmented and impotent. The Southerners, gentlemen trained to the saddle and the hunt, thought of themselves as far better soldiers than their New England neighbors, a people of definitely middle-class character. The habit of command was part of the equipment of a Virginia or Carolina aristocrat. For reasons at least in part of regional pride, the Southerners were anxious to see the continental army under the command of a general from their section. On the other hand they were not by any means united on their candidate. Even among the Virginia delegates there were differences of opinion. Peyton Randolph went his own way, and Harrison seemed lukewarm. Among the New Englanders there was equal difficulty in uniting on a candidate: some preferred Ward in spite of his age, others favored Joseph Warren or Hancock. "Mr. Paine," Adams later wrote, "did not come forward, and even Mr. Samuel Adams was irresolute."

Meanwhile the army around Boston waited impatiently to be taken under the wing of Congress. Adams, turning the problem over in his mind, took counsel with his cousin. One morning before the delegates had assembled, John led Samuel Adams on a constitutional around the State House yard, and took the occasion to review the situation in which the Congress found itself. There was first of all the army at Boston which must soon be supported by men and by money or it would dwindle away, hungry, ill clothed and disheartened. Then there was the matter of a general to command it. John had done all in his power to bring the Massachusetts delegates to some resolution but with no avail. They would pledge themselves to nothing. The issue must be forced, he told his cousin, adding, "I am determined . . . to make a direct motion that Congress should adopt the army before Boston, and appoint Colonel Washington in command of it." Samuel listened thoughtfully but offered no rebuttal and the friends entered the State House together and took their seats.

As soon as the delegates had been called to order Adams asked to be recognized by President Hancock. There was, he declared, great danger in procrastination. If Congress did not take over the army at Boston it might disintegrate, certainly it could not become an effective fighting force. When he came to the suggestion that a general be at once appointed by Congress to assume command of the army at Boston and that a man splendidly equipped for that high office was present among their number, he fancied he saw a look of anticipation on Hancock's face, but when he went on to speak of the "independent fortune, great talents, and excellent . . . character" of a gentleman, not from Massachusetts, but from Virginia, the President's face fell; "mortification and resentment were," to John's eye, expressed "as forcibly as his face could exhibit them," while Washington, embarrassed by Adams' eulogy, slipped hastily out of the room.[7]

Samuel Adams seconded the motion, which seemed to increase Hancock's pique, and debate followed. Peyton Randolph joined forces with Roger Sherman to argue that the army, made up exclusively of New England men, had a perfectly good New England general. Robert Treat Paine likewise spoke up for Ward, while Cushing expressed fears that Massachusetts men might resent being led by a foreigner. It was obviously not the moment to push the issue and it was put by for another day. Meanwhile, there was energetic lobbying; in Adams' words, "Pains were taken out of doors to obtain a unanimity." There was so clearly a majority for the Virginian that the dissenters were persuaded to withdraw their opposition and on June 15 the Colonel was nominated and elected unanimously and Congress adopted the army at Cambridge. Ward was elected second in command and the Englishman, Charles Lee, third. John wrote to Abigail two days later that "the modest, virtuous, the amiable, generous, and brave George Washington, Esquire," had been appointed commander-in-chief, an appointment which, he was confident, would have a "great effect in cementing and securing the union of these colonies" which "the liberties of America depend upon, in a great degree."[8]

Congress determined at the same time to send to Boston ten companies of Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia frontiersmen, "the most accurate marksmen in the world," armed with the spectacular rifle, a weapon with a grooved barrel that could be fired with great accuracy; and also to raise two million dollars for the support of the army.

As commander-in-chief, Washington was a success from the first. James Warren wrote that he gave "great satisfaction," and Abigail was entirely captivated: "You had prepared me to entertain a favorable opinion of him," she admitted, "but I thought the half was not told me. Dignity with ease and complacency, the gentleman and the soldier look agreeably blended in him. Modesty marks every line and feature of his face. Those lines of Dryden instantly occurred to me:

> 'Mark his majestic fabric; he's a temple
> Sacred by birth, and built by hands divine;
> His soul's the deity that lodges there;
> Nor is the pile unworthy of the god.'"[9]

The martial spirit was evident everywhere in the city. Two thousand light infantrymen, grenadiers, riflemen, light horse, and artillery, all in uniform, went through the manual of arms and close-order drill for the citizens of Philadelphia, conducting their maneuvers with "remarkable dexterity." John was especially impressed by the riflemen, who shot "with great exactness, at amazing distances." Even whole companies of Quakers joined in the parade. When John rode out of the city to start the new generals—Washington, Lee and Schuyler—on their way, he was accompanied by the city light horse, a number of militia officers and a military band. Observing the splendor of the officers and the admiring crowds that lined the streets, he felt a twinge of jealousy: "I, poor creature, worn out with scribbling for my bread and my liberty, low in spirits and weak in health, must leave others to wear the laurels which I have sown; others to eat the bread which I have earned." And on another occasion he burst out, "Oh, that I were a soldier. I will be. I am reading military books. Everybody must, will, and shall be a soldier."[10]

Adams had procured for his former clerk, William Tudor, a position as one of Washington's aides-de-camp. Having so placed him, he fired off barrages of questions. There were dozens of young Southern officers who had recently joined the army at Boston; he wished Tudor to "make the most minute inquiry, after every one of those and let me know his character, for I am determined I will know that army, and the character of all its officers." He wanted Tudor to give him as much information as possible about the engineers and the artillery officers and whether the generals were satisfied with them. "Pray find out," he added, "the name, character and behavior of every stranger that shall be put into any place in the army and let me know it," as well as "the whole history of the military lives of the brigadier generals and colonels of New England."[11] The officers must study the principles of the military art. If there were no books available measures should be taken to procure them, because it would be "a shame for youths of genius and education to be in the army without exerting themselves to become masters of the profession." Adams therefore wished to Tudor to compile a list of such classic military works and he would try to get them. "Our young gentlemen," he wrote, must be masters "of all the languages and arts which are subservient to politics and war. Politics are the science of human happiness and war the art of securing it. I would fain therefore have both perfectly understood."[12]

Braintree, although in no immediate danger from the British, felt the impact of war in a number of ways, some trifling and some momentous. The Adams house was on the Boston road and militiamen passing back and forth from the American lines around Boston stopped off at almost any hour of the day or night for a meal, for a drink of water or a cup of cider or rum. On more than one occasion tired soldiers threw their blankets on the parlor floor and slept as though drugged. Refugees who had escaped from the city, shaken and fatigued, found shelter there for "a day, a night, a week." Abigail saw the weary, fearful, soiled face of war and was dismayed.

In the spring the whole countryside had been aroused by the arrival of three British sloops and a cutter off the Weymouth shore. The alarm was given, the militia seized their arms, families prepared to flee to the woods, and Abigail's aunt, Mrs. Cotton Tufts, to the acute embarrassment of her husband, had her bed thrown into a cart and ordered the Negro houseboy to drive her off to Bridgewater. It turned out to be a foraging party after Levett's hay on Grape Island. Some local men, Adams' brothers among them, commandeered a Hingham lighter, drove the British off and burned eighty tons of stacked fodder.

Many things were in short supply. There was meat enough in Braintree but little or no coffee, sugar or pepper. If supplies ran out, Abigail wrote resolutely, they could live on whortleberries and milk from their cows. She especially needed pins. Perhaps John would send Bass out to buy a bundle in Philadelphia. She would gladly give ten dollars for a thousand. Closing a letter to John, she could not forbear to make a complaint. His letters were "written in so much haste that they scarcely leave room for a social feeling. They let me know that you exist, but some of them contain scarcely six lines." They were more like battle communiqués than the letters of a devoted husband to his adoring wife. If the debates of Congress were secret, she might at least receive some "sentimental effusions of the heart. I am sure you are not destitute of them," she chided. "Or are they all absorbed in the great public?" She could not be so reserved: "Good night. With thoughts of thee I close my eyes. Angels guard and protect thee."[13]

On the fifteenth of June the Boston Committee of Safety learned that Gage intended to seize the high ground at Dorchester Heights. A Council of War decided to occupy the hill above Charlestown as a countermove. On the night of June 16 a force of some twelve hundred Massachusetts militiamen under the command of Colonel William Prescott established themselves on Breed's Hill above the town of Charlestown and erected hasty fortifications. The next day Gage sent General Sir William Howe with some twenty-four hundred of the finest English assault troops to drive the rebels off.

Soon after daybreak the British ships and shore batteries began to pound the American lines. The first large-scale engagement of the American Revolution was under way. Abigail, with the sound of distant cannonading in her ears, sat down to write her husband: "The day—perhaps the decisive day—is come, on which the fate of America depends. My bursting heart must find vent at my pen. . . . A particular account of these dreadful but, I hope, glorious days will be transmitted to you, no doubt, in the exactest manner." She was too agitated to continue; it was several days before she could take up her pen to finish the letter and even then she dared not say how the battle had come out: "I think I am very brave, upon the whole. If danger comes near my dwelling, I suppose I shall shudder. We want powder but, with the blessing of heaven, we fear them not."[14]

When word of the battle at Bunker Hill reached Philadelphia, almost a hundred men gathered at the lodgings of the Massachusetts delegates to hear the details of the action. As soon as Adams and his companions had passed on what information they had, they went looking for the members of the Philadelphia Committee of Safety to beg some powder. Although it was one o'clock in the morning the Committee, roused from their beds, agreed on the spot to dispatch ninety quarter casks from the city's supply and start it on its way before morning.

Adams found some consolation for the destruction of Charlestown in the reflection that "cities may be rebuilt. . . . But a constitution of government, once changed from freedom, can never be restored. Liberty, once lost, is lost forever." He was especially proud of Abigail for the spirit that she showed amid "the shocks and terrors of the times." "You are really brave, my dear," he wrote. "You are a heroine, and you have reason to be. For the worst that can happen can do you no harm. A soul as pure, as benevolent, as virtuous and pious as yours has nothing to fear, but everything to hope and expect from the last of human evils."[15] To be assured of the consolations of the afterlife was perhaps not exactly what Abigail had in mind when she chided her husband for the impersonal quality of his letters, but she was delighted to be called a heroine.

Adams was starved for news from Boston. But then he was insatiable in any event. He begged Warren to write him more often and urged Abigail to stir up his friends. It was maddening to be working and planning for Boston and have no idea of what went on there. His anxiety was increased by the continued procrastination of Congress. "There are still hopes," he wrote Warren, "that ministry and Parliament will immediately recede as soon as they hear of the Battle of Lexington, the spirit of New York and Philadelphia, the permanency of the colonies, etc." John was sure that the delegates deceived themselves and he himself expected nothing but "deceit and hostility, fire, famine, pestilence . . . from administration and Parliament." Yet, he added, "the colonies like all bodies of men must and will have their way and their humor, and even their whims." Nor was the end in sight. "You will see," he predicted, "a strange oscillation between love and hatred, between war and peace—preparations for war and negotiations for peace. We must have a petition to the King and a delicate proposal of negotiation, etc. This negotiation I dread like death: but it must be proposed. We can't avoid it. Discord and total disunion would be the certain effect of a resolute refusal to petition and negotiate." If negotiation was opened Congress would need all its "wit, vigilance and virtue to avoid being deceived, wheedled, threatened or bribed out of our freedom."

Like his politician master Clarendon, John respected time. The art of politics was the art of timing. Until the colonies were ripe nothing could be reaped. So he must suppress his impatience as best he could. But it did nothing for his disposition to do so.

Progress toward some determined course of action was impeded by receipt of a resolution of the House of Commons in which Parliament promised to forbear "to impose any further duty, tax or assessment" on the colonies. The resolution was accompanied by a letter from Lord North exhorting the colonists to accept the resolves as the furthest limit of parliamentary concession. Those delegates who could not face the possibility of independence were encouraged to delay, debate and petition in the hope of more concessions.

Adams was indignant. North "rocks the cradle and sings lullaby, and the innocent children go to sleep," he wrote. "Next spring we shall be jockied by negotiation, or have hot work in war."[16] It especially rankled Adams to find his friend John Dickinson holding back and, worse than that, trying to influence the delegates from the critical state of South Carolina to oppose all measures that might lead to a final break with the Mother Country. Charles Thomson confided to Adams that Dickinson's apparent change of heart was the work of his wife and mother, both Quakers and both of Tory sympathies, who nagged him constantly. His mother, a strong-willed old lady, told him, "Johnny, you will be hanged, your estate will be forfeited and confiscated, you will leave your excellent wife a widow and your charming children orphans, beggars, and infamous." All this was reinforced by his wife's tears and pleas. There was perhaps a touch of sanctimoniousness in John's response: "From my soul I pitied Mr. Dickinson," he wrote, "I made his case my own. If my mother and my wife had expressed such sentiments to me, I was certain that if they did not wholly unman me and make me an apostate, they would make me the most miserable man alive. I was very happy that my mother and my wife and my brothers, my wife's father and mother, and grandfather Col. John Quincy and his lady, Mr. Norton Quincy, Dr. Tufts, Mr. Cranch and all her near relations as well as mine, had uniformly been of my mind, so that I always enjoyed perfect peace at home."[17]

The solicitations and the pressures on the South Carolinians produced, in Adams' view, a most unfortunate wavering and hesitation. The delegates from Charleston grew loud in their denunciations of independence and Adams clashed frequently with the conservatives. Dickinson, a moderate Whig and under heavy pressures from the Quaker and proprietary interests of his Province, proposed in Congress that another petition be sent to the King, humbly begging once more for a redress of grievances. To Adams the time had long passed for petitions and he opposed the measure vigorously, speaking for more than an hour in a painstaking review of the actions of Great Britain and of the colonies. It was dangerous for Congress to procrastinate. It could only encourage the British to believe that the Americans lacked the will, ultimately, to make Boston's cause their own; it could only dishearten patriots or distract them with hopes of a painless solution to the crisis in which they found themselves every day more deeply involved. In the heat of the debate, Adams was called from the hall and slipped quietly away. Dickinson saw him and followed him out, stopped him in the hall and, quite beside himself, began to upbraid the New Englander in the manner of a master to a schoolboy. "What is the reason, Mr. Adams, that you New Englandmen oppose our measures of reconciliation? There now is Sullivan in a long harangue following you, in a determined opposition to our petition to the King. Look ye! If you don't concur with us in our pacific system, I, and a number of us, will break off from you in New England, and we will carry on the opposition by ourselves in our own way." To his surprise, Adams found he could manage his temper and he replied coolly, "Mr. Dickinson, there are many things that I can very cheerfully sacrifice to harmony, and even unanimity; but I am not to be threatened [into an] express . . . approbation of measures which my judgment reprobates. Congress must judge, and if they pronounce against me, I must submit."[18] Such at least was Adams' recollection of the exchange forty years after the event, and we have no reason to suppose that some such words were not spoken. The two men, in any event, never spoke privately to each other again and Adams, his irritation aggravated by the success of the petition in Congress, gave free rein to his anger in a hasty letter written to James Warren. "A certain great fortune [a reference to Dickinson's wife's estate] and piddling genius, whose fame has been trumpeted so loudly, has given a silly cast to our whole doings," he wrote. "We are between hawk and buzzard. We ought to have had in our hands a month ago the whole legislative, executive and judicial of the whole continent, and have completely modeled a constitution; to have raised a naval power, and opened all our ports wide; to have arrested every friend to government on the continent and held them as hostages for the poor victims in Boston, and then opened the door as wide as possible for peace and reconciliation. . . . Is all this extravagant? Is it wild? Is it not the soundest policy?" he asked Warren.[19]

On July 7, Congress approved a "Declaration of the Causes of Taking Up Arms" designed to be read to the troops under Washington's command at Boston. Thomas Jefferson, who had arrived in Congress late in

June, had composed the first draft, but his language had been too militant for some of the delegates, especially for Jefferson's fellow committeeman, John Dickinson. Rather than alienate the moderates, Jefferson gave way to the Farmer, who framed a milder statement that ended with the ringing words, "We most solemnly, before God and the world, declare that, exerting the utmost energy of those powers which our beneficent Creator hath graciously bestowed upon us, the arms we have been compelled by our enemies to assume, we will, in defiance of every hazard, with unabating firmness and perseverance, employ for the preservation of our liberties; being with one-mind resolved to die free men rather than live slaves."

Although the Declaration did not go as far as he would have liked, Adams was ready to concede that it had "some mercury in it" and was "pretty frank, plain and clear. If Lord North don't compliment every mother's son of us, with a bill of attainder, in exchange for it, I shall think it owing to fear," he wrote William Tudor.[20]

The next day the triumph of Dickinson's forces was sealed by the Congress' acceptance of the petition to the King, beseeching His Majesty "that your royal authority and influence may be graciously interposed to procure us relief from our afflicting fears and jealousies." The address to inhabitants of Great Britain ("Friends, Countrymen, and Brethren") was likewise approved, but this was much less to Adams' taste: "Prettyness, juvenilities, and much less puerilities become not a great assembly like this, the representative of a great people," he wrote Warren.[21]

Adams' attitude toward Congress fluctuated from day to day depending on the resolution or timidity which that body showed. What perhaps depressed him most was the behavior of his fellow delegates from Massachusetts. "No mortal tale can equal it," he wrote Abigail, "The fidgets, the whims, the caprice, the vanity, the superstition, the inability of some of us" must make a tale for the future.[22] The delegates from the Bay Colony would not act in concert. On critical issues they frequently found themselves divided; they had not even been able to agree on the appointment of officers from New England, and on broader measures they discovered irreconcilable differences which in Adams' view "lost us reputation, as well as many great advantages which we might otherwise have obtained for our colony."[23]

Despite the dilatoriness of Congress, Adams managed on the whole to keep a proper perspective. "Congress," he wrote Abigail, "will support us, but in their own way." Its business was "as great and important as can be entrusted to man, and the difficulty and intricacy of it prodigious. When fifty or sixty men have a constitution to form for a great empire, at the same time that they have a country of fifteen hundred miles in extent to fortify, millions to arm and train, a naval power to begin, and extensive commerce to regulate, numerous tribes of Indians to negotiate with, a standing army of twenty-seven thousand men to raise, pay, victual, and officer, I really shall pity those fifty or sixty men," he declared. America was "a great, unwieldy body. Its progress must be slow." It was like a fleet sailing in convoy; "the fleetest sailors must wait for the dullest and slowest."[24]

At the end of July Congress adjourned for the month of August. However far it had fallen short of the spirit and resolution that Adams had wished, it had done a good deal. The army had been taken over, officers appointed, some money, at least, provided, and a general plan for the defense of the colonies hammered out. Even though he himself had never been "so completely miserable" with his "bad health, blind eyes, want of intelligence" from Massachusetts, and constant labors, often from seven in the morning until eleven at night, Adams felt that Congress, cautious and deliberate as it had been, had no reason to be ashamed of its accomplishments. It was, he wrote Warren, "a vast and complicated system of business which we have gone through, and we were all of us inexperienced in it."[25]

Adams, who had opposed adjournment, hurried home in mid-August for a brief respite. Before he arrived home his brother Elihu had died suddenly and mysteriously. The death cast a shadow over John's return. Although separated by six years, their relationship had been a close and affectionate one. But Adams had little time for grief. He had been appointed Chief Justice of the newly constituted Superior Court and also elected by the Provincial Congress to the Council. Moreover, he had to face what was perhaps the most embarrassing episode of his life, the interception by the British and the publication by the Tory press of the letter he had written to James Warren denouncing John Dickinson as a "piddling genius." The friends of Great Britain were delighted with the errant missive. It was taken as evidence of a deep rift in patriot ranks and as proof that the Whigs were aiming at independence rather than redress of grievances. The letter would haunt him for many months to come.

Without even stopping at Braintree, Adams went on to Watertown, where the Provincial Congress was meeting, to take his seat in the Council for a few days and to confer with Washington and the other general officers. General Lee, a knotty, garrulous little man, conducted him with a great air of bravado and three or four little yapping dogs on a visit to an outpost near the British lines, where John, in the classic manner of touring politicians, got a mild but satisfying whiff of warfare.

On his way back to Braintree for a few days of rest before setting out once more for Philadelphia, John met up with a horse jockey for whom, on several occasions, he had argued cases. "Oh! Mr. Adams," the jockey exclaimed, "what great things have you and your colleagues done for us! We can never be grateful enough to you. There are no courts of justice now in this Province, and I hope there never will be another." Adams turned his back on the man and indulged in some bitter reflections. Was this the object for which he had been fighting? Was the jockey's attitude characteristic of the average person who saw, in the fight for liberty and freedom, only the hope of being free of paying their just debts? "Are these the sentiments of such people?" he asked himself. "And how many of them are there in the country?" Half the nation for all he knew, "for half the nation were debtors, if not more," and such were always the sentiments of debtors. "If the power of the country should get into such hands, and there is great danger that it will, to what purpose," he asked himself, "have we sacrificed our time, health, and everything else?" It was almost enough to make a man a Tory.

When he arrived back at Braintree he was exhausted in mind and body. Fed and fussed over by Abigail, he fell into bed and slept for sixteen hours and then rose, reborn, to ramble "all alone, through the fields, groves, meadows . . . of peaceful happy Braintree," up Penn's Hill and back through the range of the Blue Hills behind the town. There, looking out over the quiet bay he felt "that wholesome solitude and nurse of sense/Where contemplation prunes her ruffled wings/And the free soul looks down to pity kings."[26]

The last and best delight was the company and conversation of Abigail. They had a thousand things to tell each other about, things that could not be trusted to letters. The children clambered over him, importuned him for stories and games and tried to tell him of the new lamb, the fox that had seized the chickens and such matters of moment in their small world. This was the joy of "arcadia, Paradise, and the Elysian fields," his to savor, as he wrote Mercy Otis Warren, until four o'clock Monday morning when he must set forth again for Philadelphia.

Monday, August 28, came inevitably and John, with his servant, Fessenden, rode off in the chilly morning to Dedham to pick up Samuel Adams and start the long journey to Philadelpha. The publication of the intercepted letter to Warren had produced such a strain among the Massachusetts delegates that it seemed advisable for them to make the trip seriatim, so to speak. The difficulty was that John loved to ride while Samuel had never mastered the art and must jounce along in his chaise, leaving his cousin to discuss principles of government with Fessenden. Soon after they were on their way, John began to try his powers of persuasion on his companion. Riding horseback, he told Samuel, was far healthier than traveling by coach or carriage. It soothed the nerves, stimulated the vital juices of the body, exhilarated the blood and in short, was a sovereign corrective for most human ills. Eloquently as John depicted the bracing and therapeutic effects of riding, the older man remained unconvinced. Refusing to admit defeat, John tried a different tack. Riding would be more sociable. The two could discuss all the great issues of the moment, map strategy, make plans to lift Congress to a higher level of boldness and enterprise, and debate the form that a constitution for new union might take. But the conclusive argument was that "some degree of skill and dexterity in horsemanship was necessary to the character of a statesman." As Adams described the leaders and chieftains of history mounted on splendid steeds, as he spoke of the noble figures they cut, dialated on the added dignity that equestrian skills imparted to the politician, he could see Samuel weakening. Three days later when they were ready to set out from Watertown on the road to Woodstock, John persuaded his cousin to mount his mare, "a very genteel and easy little creature," and put Fessenden in Samuel's chaise. "We were all disappointed and surprised," he wrote to Warren. "Instead of the tailor riding to Brentford we beheld an easy, genteel figure upon the horse, and a good deal of spirit and facility in the management." So much so indeed that the two servants began to josh John and vow that his cousin outdid him as a horseman. At Hide's tavern in Woodstock, John observed that Samuel "did not sit so erect in his chair as he had upon his horse." That evening he prevailed upon his cousin to purchase two yards of flannel which the landlady, with the assistance of a tailor woman at the inn, made into a pair of drawers "which next morning were put on, and not only defended [Samuel] from any further injury, but entirely healed the little breach which had begun."

But there remained one slight imperfection in the horsemanship of the revolutionary firebrand. "Easy and genteel" as his seat might be, he could not mount his horse but had to be boosted up by Fessenden and Harrison, Sam's servant, while John watched and gave jocular advice. This was hardly the style of a hero, so John undertook "to instruct him in the necessary art of mounting." He must grasp the bridle so, with his left hand in the horse's mane midway between his ears and shoulders; then a vigorous spring would carry him "very gracefully into the seat, without the least danger of falling over on the other side. . . . The experiment was tried and succeeded to admiration," and for the rest of the journey "the brace of Adamses," two short, stout men, jogged along companionably, Samuel gaining by the wholesome exercise "fresh strength, courage, activity and spirit"; by the time they reached Philadelphia, John was ready to take credit for "having probably added several years to a life so important to his country."[27]

The return to Philadelphia was not an easy one at best. The intercepted letters had been published in the city during the vacation of Congress and the hearts of the moderates were hardened against him. Friends passed him without a word and there was a coolness evident even in the manner of some of the warmest patriots. The letter to Warren was put to rhyme by the Tories and one satire entitled "A Paraphrase upon the Second Epistle of John the Roundhead, to James [Warren], the Prolocutor of the Rump Parliament . . . Dear Devil . . ." had a large and appreciative audience.[28]

If Adams had doubts about Dickinson's reaction to the letters, they were soon set at rest. Walking to the State House along Chestnut Street, he passed the Farmer close enough to touch elbows. The New England John bowed and tipped his hat; the Pennsylvania John moved neither "hat or head or hand," but looked straight ahead. Adams' trouble was his devilish gift for hitting off an opponent (or a friend) in a phrase so trenchant that it stuck to the victim like a burr. In this instance it was to stick to John, too, to his embarrassment and chagrin. He professed contempt for the criticism that the letters had aroused and, indeed, came in time to be quite proud of the errant epistles. His only regret, he told Abigail, was that they were not better written, that they were such "hasty, crude scraps." He heard that they had caused quite a stir in England and "contributed somewhat towards making certain persons [the two Adamses] to be thought the greatest statesmen in the world. So much for vanity," he added.[29]

The delegates were, as usual, slow to assemble but John was heartened to see Georgia represented for the first time, bringing to thirteen the number of colonies in Congress. Archibald Bulloch, John Houstoun and John Zubly made up the Georgia delegation. Bulloch was "a solid, clever man" who wore a suit of itchy, badly cut homespun of domestic manufacture with a self-conscious air of virtue; Dr. Zubly was a Swiss-born clergyman whose thick accent was soon heard in congressional debate. Of the three Adams found Houstoun most congenial.

Patrick Henry had been made a general, Pendleton and Richard Bland had been excused because of poor health and replaced by Francis Lightfoot Lee, brother of Arthur and Richard Henry Lee, George Wythe, "a lawyer of the first eminence," and Thomas Nelson, "a fat man" but an effective speaker, "alert and lively for his weight."

John was tender as the debates resumed. He sat listening to his confreres with a somewhat more than usually jaundiced ear. He was impatient of talk. The army at Boston had not been paid a shilling for the month of August, the Quartermaster General and the Commissary General were both out of money, their credit exhausted and their stock of provisions dwindling. In the State House the members talked on as though they had an eternity of time: raising "points of little consequence" and debating them as though the fate of the world rested thereon. Samuel Chase was "violent and boisterous"; Edward Rutledge shrugged and nodded his head, rolling his eyes about and speaking through his nose, "as the Yankees sing . . . in a rough and rapid torrent . . . without much force or effect"; Eliphalet Dyer, always prolix, seemed unusually "longwinded and roundabout, obscure and cloudy, very talkative and very tedious"; and Adams watched critically as Roger Sherman, whose good sense he respected, grimaced and gesticulated, "stiffness and awkwardness itself, rigid as starched linen or buckram, awkward as a junior bachelor or sophomore." His own course for the present was silence, at least within the halls. Outside politicking could go forward discreetly among the new and as yet uncommitted delegates from Georgia.

On October 2 a committee composed of Thomas Lynch, Benjamin Harrison and Franklin was appointed to confer with General Washington at Boston and equipped with detailed instructions which in effect empowered the General to establish a Continental Army. This was the boldest step yet taken and Adams wrote Abigail that he had never seen "so serious and determined a spirit" in Congress. If the delegates were willing to act, the proclamations could wait.

He comforted Abigail with the reflection that "'The ways of heaven are dark and intricate,' its designs are often inscrutable, but are always wise and just and good." From his entrance into public life, he had had the apprehension that "things would be wrought up to their present crisis. I saw from the beginning that the controversy was of such a nature that it never would be settled, and every day convinces me more and more. This has been the source of all the disquietude of my life. It has lain down and risen up with me these twelve years." The thought of a separation from Great Britain had always given him a "great deal of grief," and even now he would make any personal sacrifice to bring peace and liberty within the British Empire.[30]

One of the most pressing problems before Congress was that of a commercial policy. Resolutions had been passed in the first Continental Congress laying down a policy of nonimportation with a policy of nonexportation to go into effect the following November if no redress of grievance had been obtained from the ministers of the Crown. The questions before the delegates were, should nonexportation be adhered to; would it hurt the colonies more than Great Britain; and finally what should be the policy of Congress toward trade with other nations? "Shall we," Adams asked Warren, "be able to maintain the war wholly without trade? Can we support the credit of our currency without it?"[31]

The problem, of course, was vastly complicated by the anomalous position of the colonists. Until they declared themselves to be otherwise the colonists were simply subjects of Great Britain, expressing a forceful protest against certain measures applied to them by the Mother Country. Under such circumstances nations that engaged in trade with the colonies invited punitive action by the British navy. "In short," as Adams put it, "if we stop our own ships, have we even a probability that the ships of foreign nations will run the venture to come here either with or without the countenance and encouragement of their several courts or states, public or private, open or secret?"

This issue brought the delegates to the kindred problem of the relation of the colonies, through Congress, to foreign nations. Should Congress seek aid from the court of France? of Spain? of Holland? What of Portugal, Prussia, Turkey, Russia or Denmark? Should Congress dispatch ambassadors to these courts? And would such ambassadors, if sent, be received? Would any European power dare England's wrath or trifle with the law of nations? Perhaps an ambassador or agent, with his pockets full of money "and his person robust and elegant enough, [might] get introduced to some of the misses and courtesans in keeping of the statesmen in France," but that would doubtless be as far as American diplomacy would extend. American proposals and American agents would probably be treated with contempt. The sad fact was that America in return for its solicitation of aid had very little to offer.

Adams grew impatient with the prolonged debate over the trade policy that Congress should adopt. "God helps those who help themselves," he wrote to Warren, "and it has ever appeared to me since this unhappy dispute began that we had no friend upon the earth to depend on but the resources of our own country, and the good sense and great virtues of our people. We shall finally be obliged to depend upon ourselves."

His own program seemed to many of his fellow delegates "wild, extravagant and romantic" but he was determined to push it nonetheless. Foreign nations needed American raw materials. Congress should thus invite all nations to send their ships to America and, although such nations could not respond officially, "many private adventurers" lured by the hope of large profits would run the risk of slipping past a British blockade; in the same way American merchants "would venture out with their vessels and cargoes, especially in winter, and would run through many dangers." By encouraging venturesome merchants, native and foreign, Adams felt "we might be supplied with necessaries."

But all this depended on the American will and ability to fortify its harbors so that British frigates could not sail in and seize ships at anchor. "To talk of coping suddenly with G.B. at sea would be Quixotism indeed, but the . . . question with me is, can we defend our harbors and rivers? If we can, we can trade." As a Boston man the matter of trade was of first concern to Adams. Delegates from the Southern colonies were relatively indifferent to the commercial problems—among them the sentiment was strong for simply stopping all trade. Adams realized that the American colonies could not carry on armed resistance against the greatest land and naval power in the world unless they could procure essential supplies from abroad. Thus his solution, radical as it appeared at first, recommended itself more strongly to Congress with each passing week as its members became increasingly aware of the requirements for waging war.

Robert Livingston supported Adams' position in the congressional debates. "Ammunition," he pointed out, "cannot be had unless we open our ports. I am for doing away [with] our nonexportation entirely. I see many advantages in leaving open the ports, none in shutting them up. . . . What is to become of our merchants, farmers, seamen, tradesmen? What an accession of strength should we throw into the hands of our enemies, if we drive all our seamen to them!"[32]

Samuel Chase wished to relax the export ban only on tobacco and lumber, arguing that nonexportation must bankrupt Great Britain and starve its people. Thomas Willing, as a merchant, was quick to point out the dangers of Francis Lightfoot Lee's suggestion that foreign powers should become the carriers of America's products. Without trade the circulation of Congress' paper money would stop and credit would dry up. One critical point around which the debate revolved was the question of whether New York, North Carolina and Georgia should permit their custom-houses to remain open and carry on trade with Great Britain. There was a general feeling among the delegates that allowing such a practice would promote jealousy and disunion; merchants in other colonies would see their neighbors making profits while they starved. On the other hand there was the inescapable problem of securing supplies. Closing all ports would invite disaster. Dr. Zubly of Georgia spoke at some length without clarifying the issue. The issue was whether the colonies must have trade or could possibly do without it. It was evident to him that "we can't do without it . . . it is prudent not to put virtue to too serious a test. I would use American virtue as sparingly as possible lest we wear it out." But to open American ports to the world would be "extremely dangerous and pernicious." England would take it as evidence that the colonists intended "to break off, to separate."[33]

A warm debate followed on providing clothing for the soldiers at Boston. It was a motion that Adams had pushed and as he recorded the discussion he felt a by now familiar spasm of irritation. There was Paine, sniping at Quartermaster General Thomas Mifflin as the keeper of a slop shop; Edward Rutledge prating about economy though the soldiers might go naked; the Pennsylvanians and the New Yorkers squabbling about where the material should be purchased—whether in New York or Philadelphia. It was impossible to raise a single issue in Congress without at once bringing into sight "prejudices and enmities, and provincial views. These," Adams noted, "are degrees of corruption. They are deviations from the public interest and rectitude." At last it was concluded to appoint a committee to purchase five thousand pounds sterling worth of goods which were to be turned over to Mifflin to distribute to the troops and the General was to get "five per cent for his trouble." The method

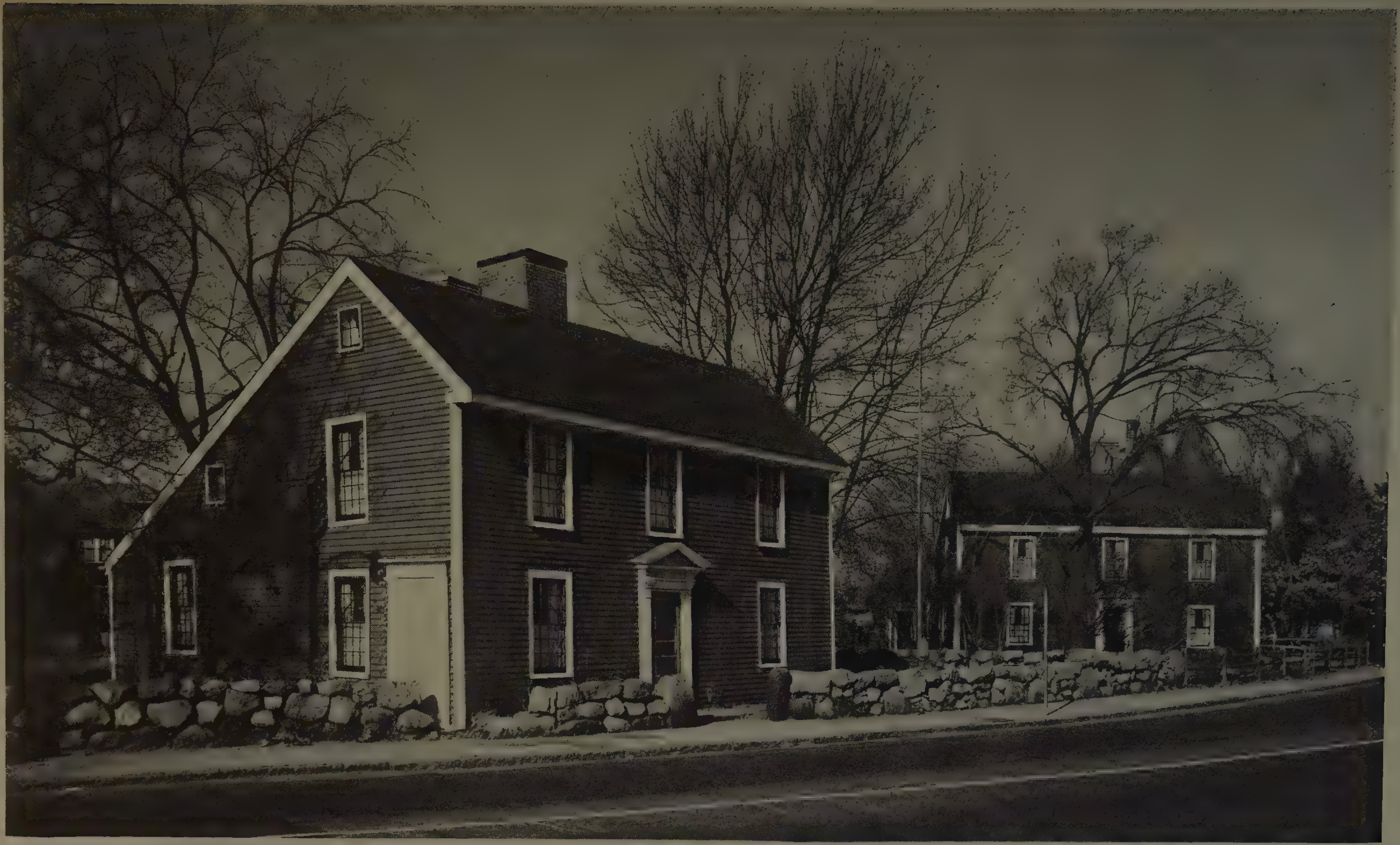


PLATE 1

Photograph by George M. Cushing

The birthplaces of John and John Quincy Adams. John Adams was born in the house on the right. He and Abigail settled in the house in the foreground and John Quincy was born there.

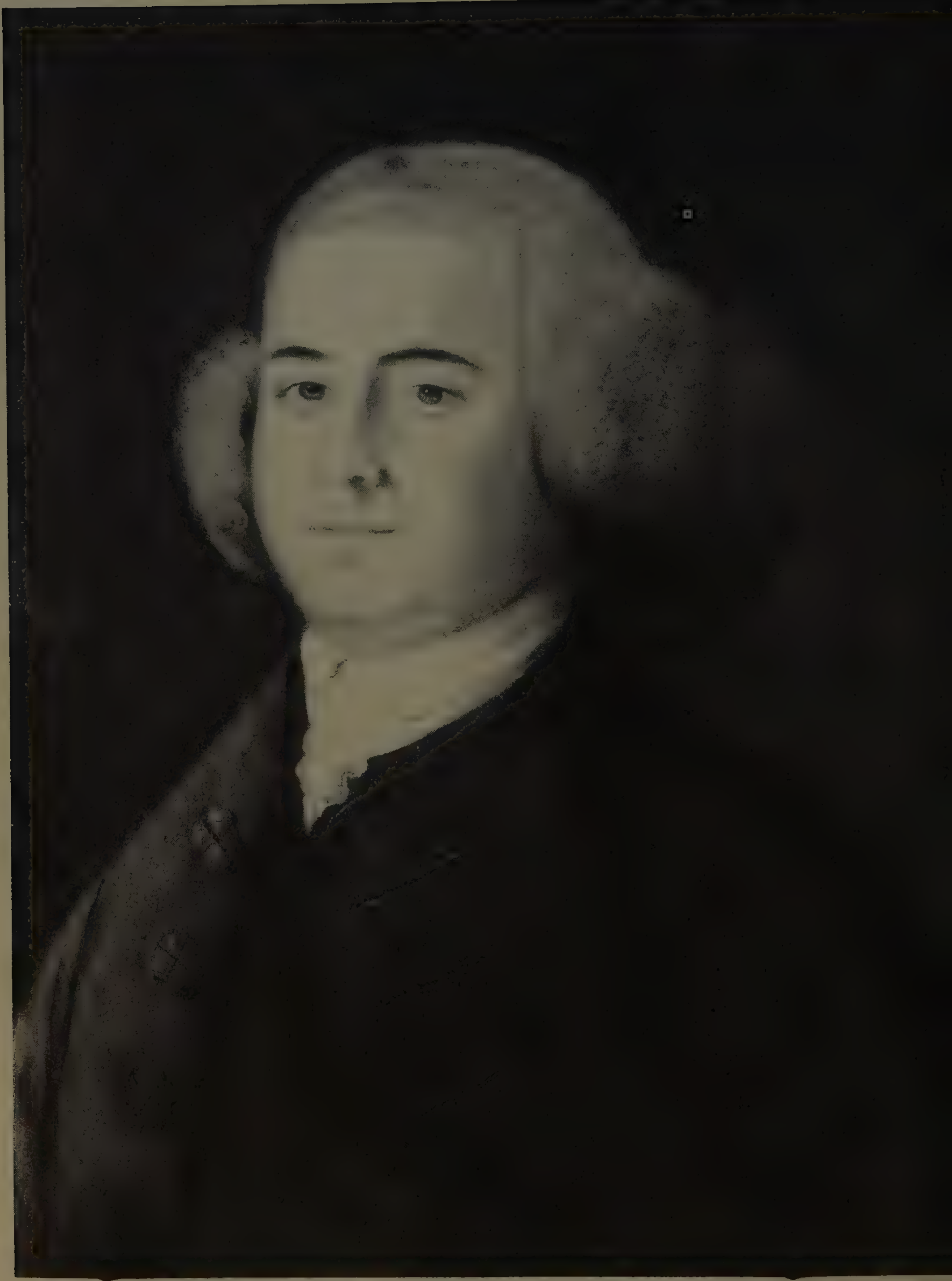
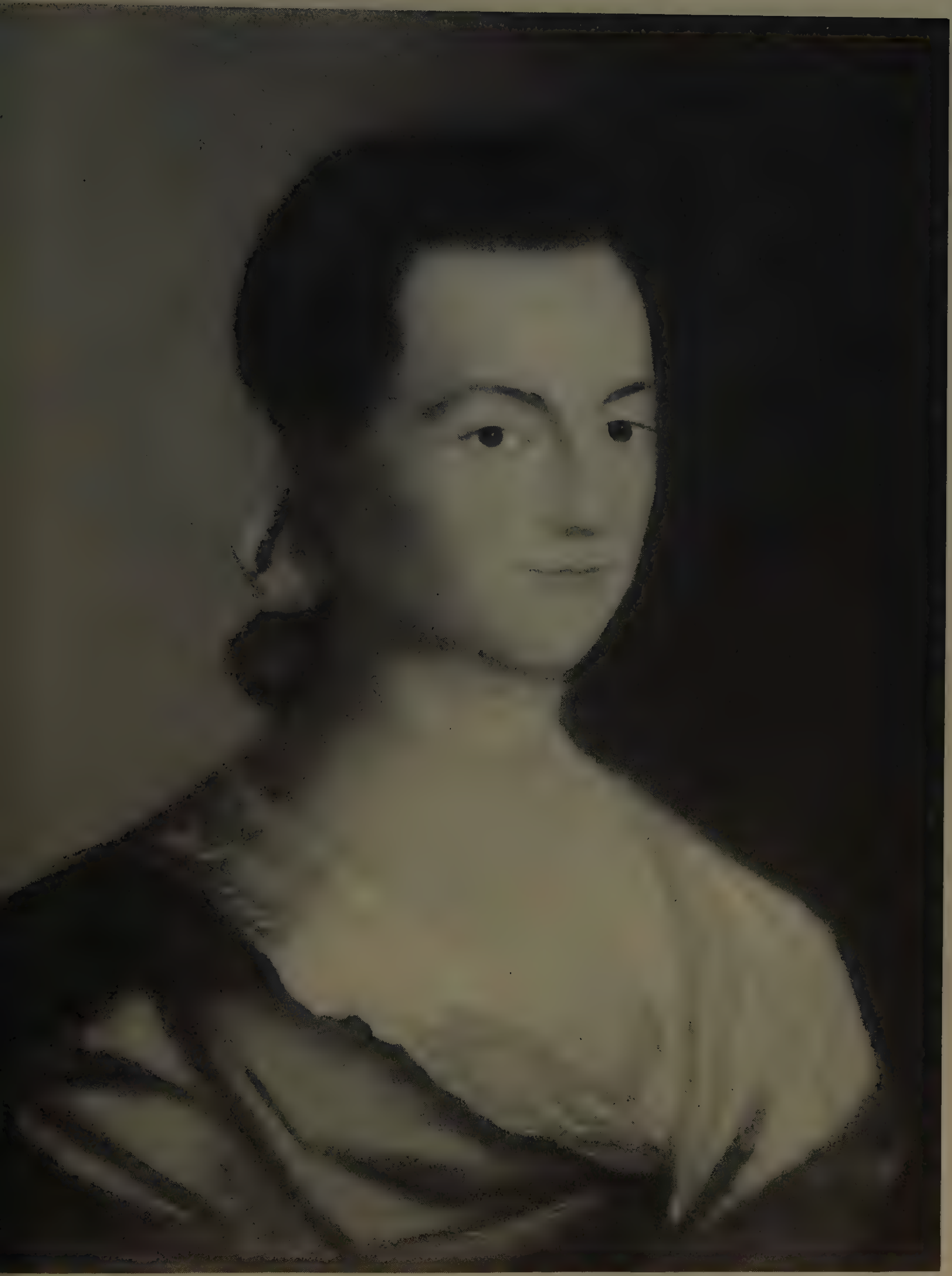


PLATE 2

Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Soci

John Adams by Benjamin Blyth. This portrait and the accompanying one of Abigail were done in pastel by a young artist in Salem when they visited the Cranches there in August 1766.



LATE 3

Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society

Abigail Adams by Benjamin Blyth.

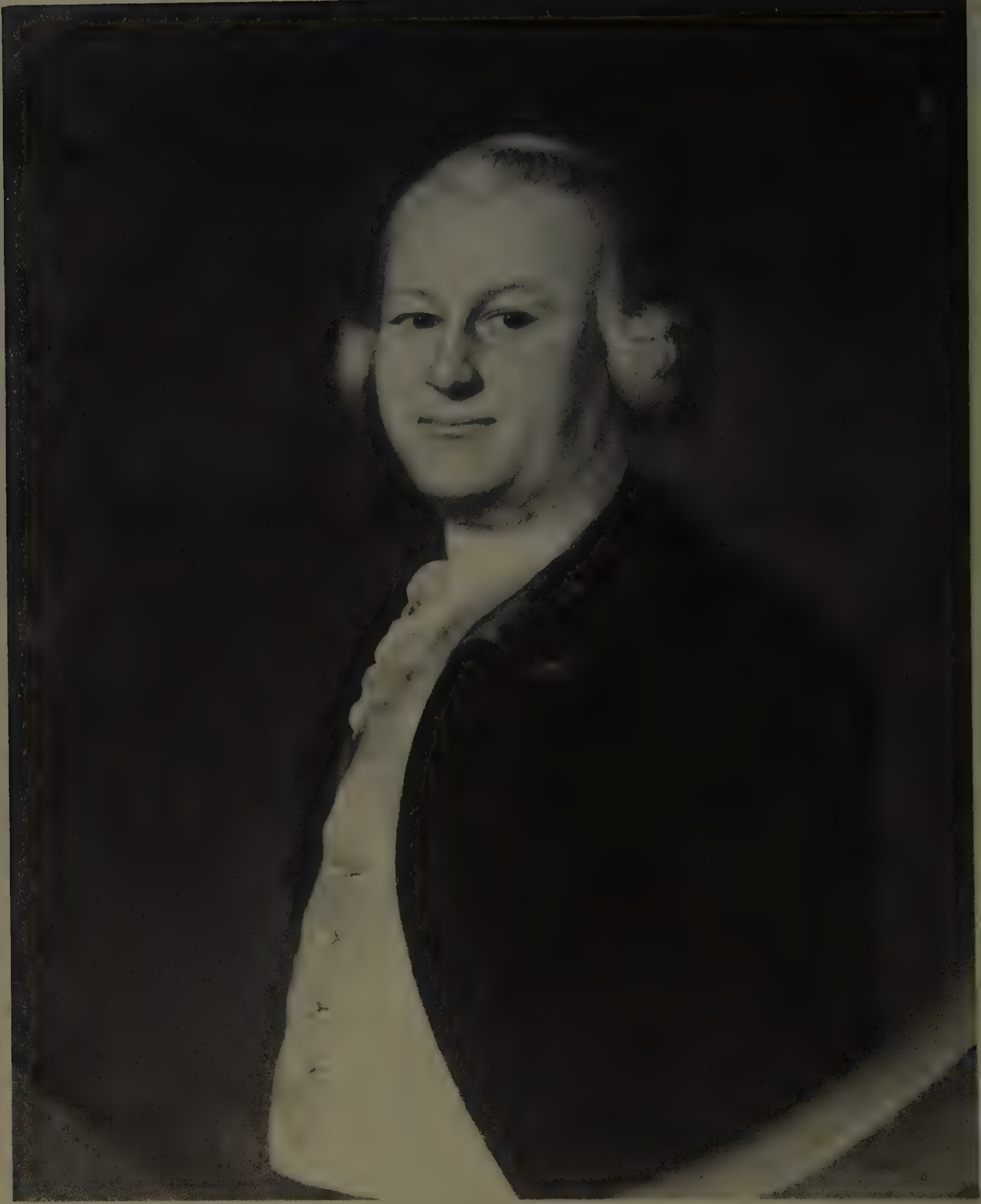
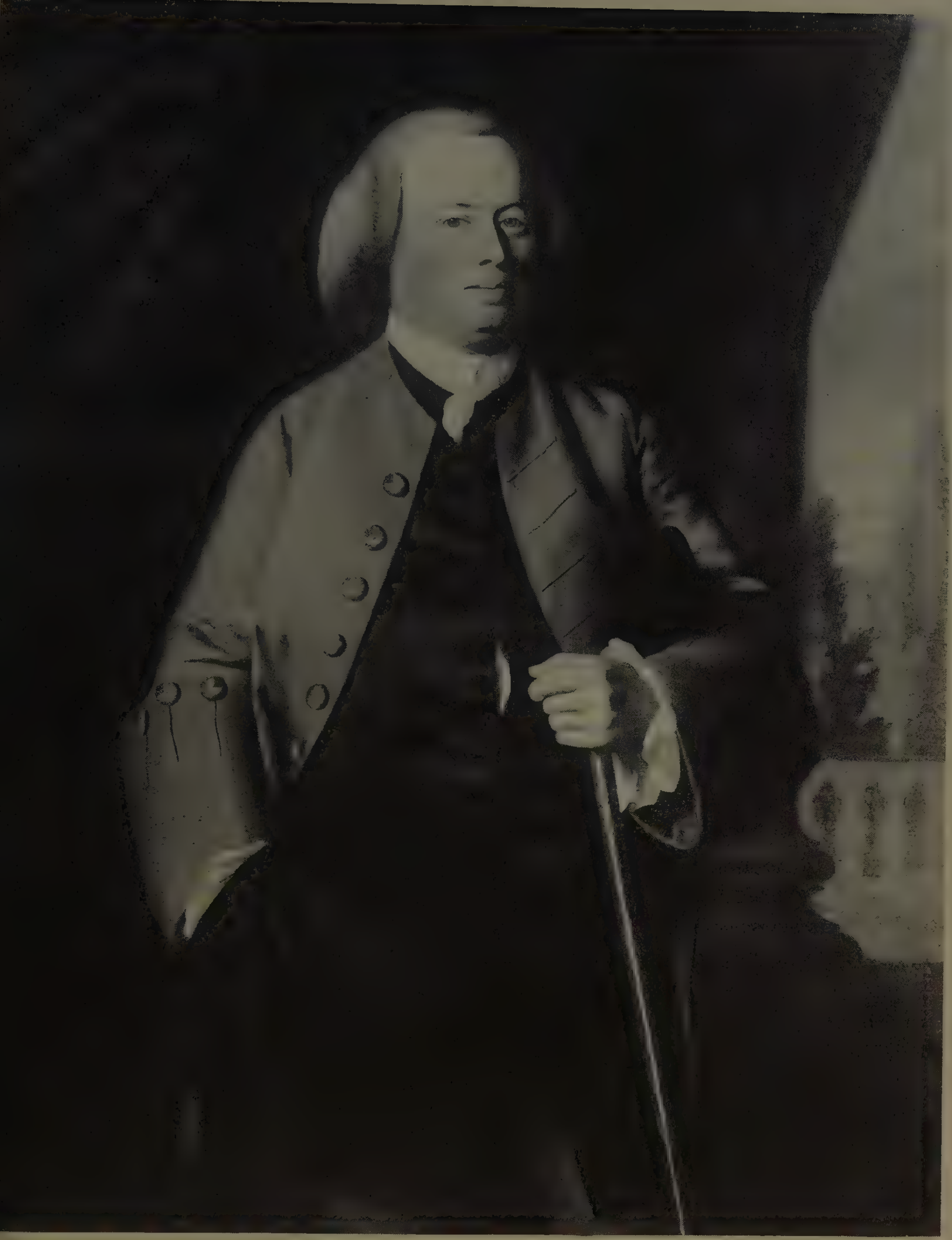


PLATE 4

Courtesy of Mrs. Carlos A. Hepp

James Otis by Joseph Blackburn. "Otis is fiery and fev'rous. His imagination flames, his passions blaze," Adams wrote in his diary.



LATE 5

Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

James Warren by John Singleton Copley.

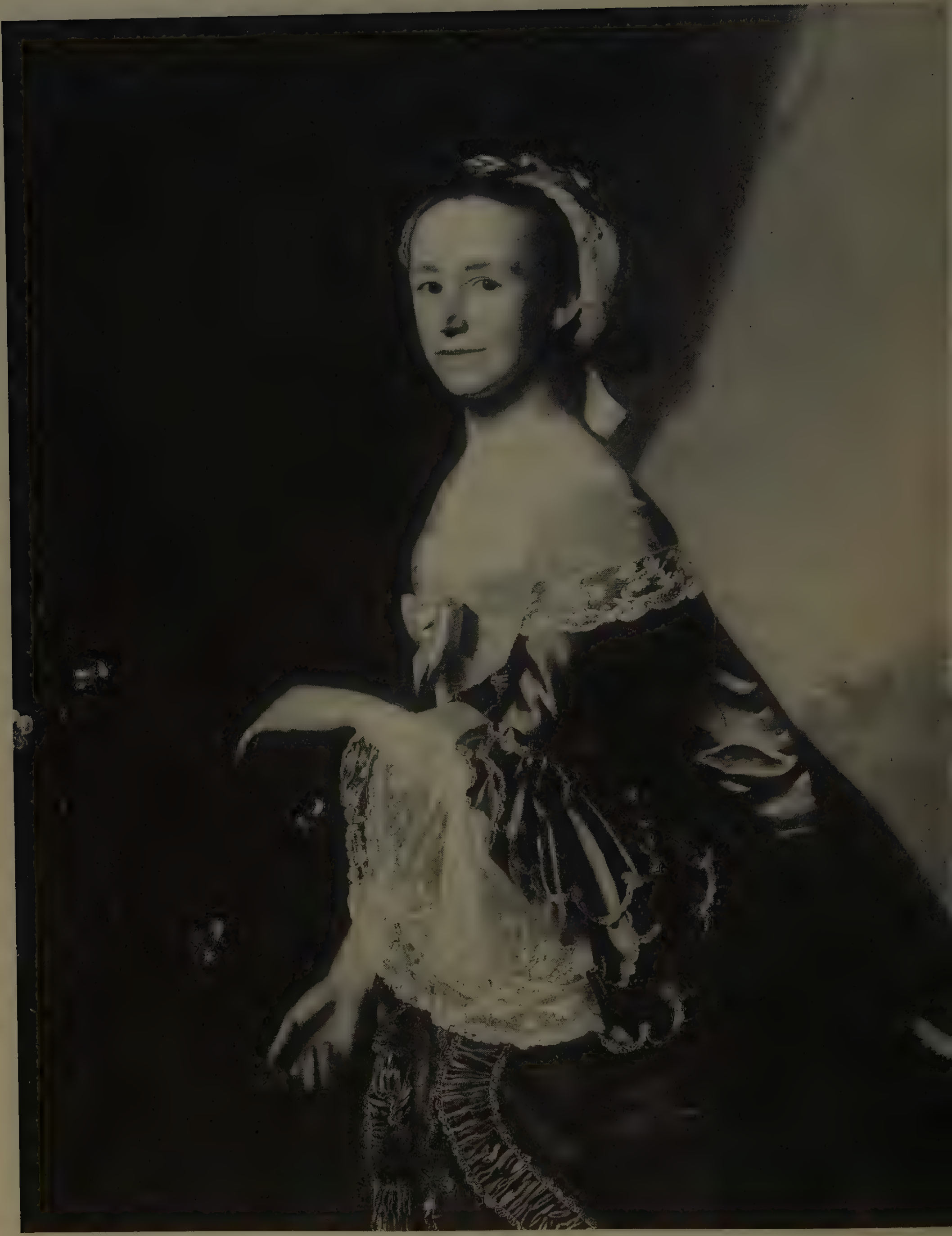


PLATE 6

Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Bost

Mercy Otis Warren by John Singleton Copley.

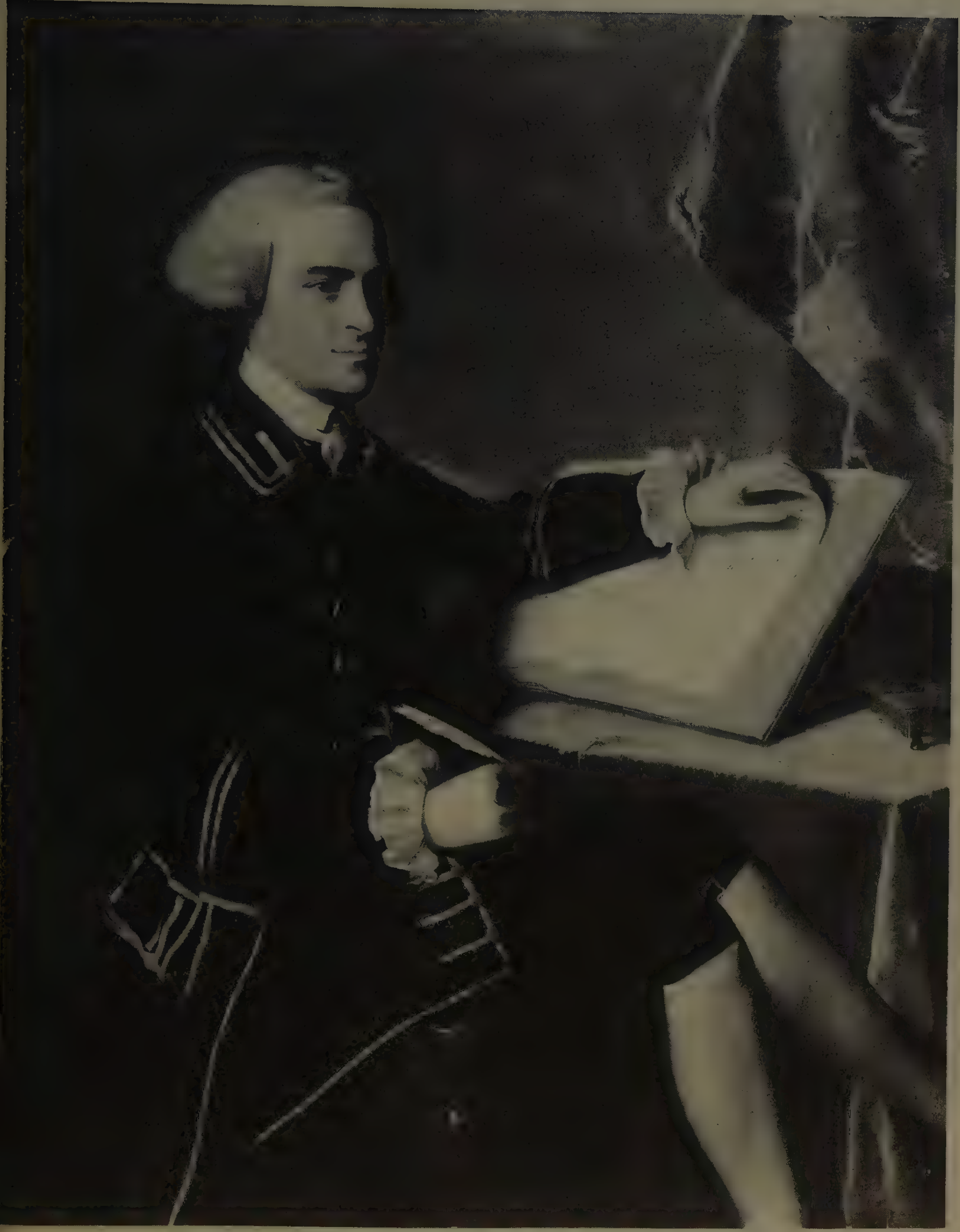


PLATE 7 *Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*

John Hancock by John Singleton Copley.

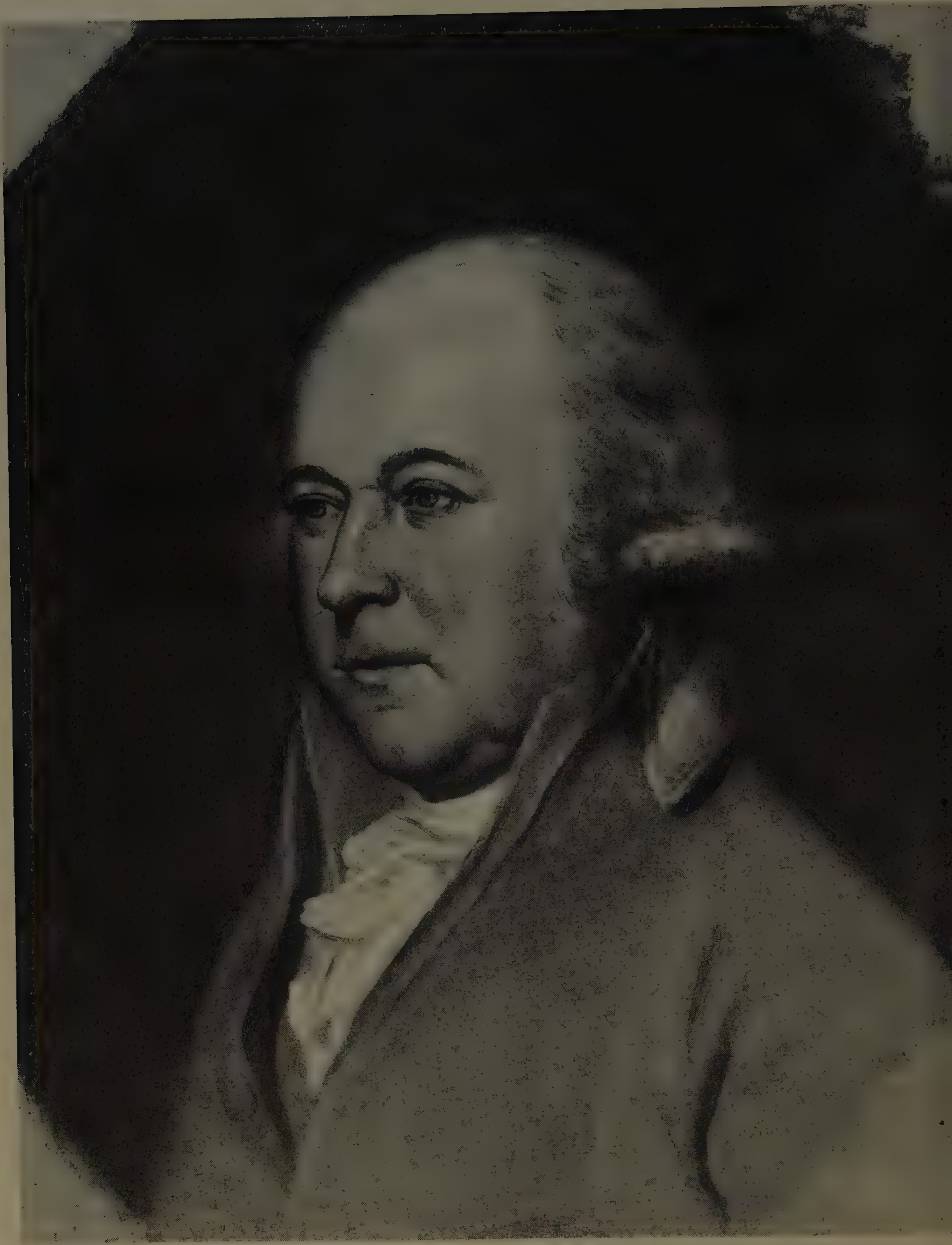


PLATE 8 *Courtesy Independence National Historical Park Collect*

John Adams by Charles Willson Peale. Adams found Peale "a tender, soft, affectionate creature. . . . He is ingenious. He has vanity, loves finery, wears a sword, gold lace, speaks French, is capable of friendship, and strong family attachments, and natural affections."

was cumbersome and inefficient but at least, John wrote, "the poor soldiers may be benefited."

Time and again the debates were impeded by the delegates' concern that nothing be done that would offend Great Britain. Thomas Johnson of Maryland confessed to "see less and less prospect of a reconciliation every day," but added, "I would not render it impossible. If we should render it impossible," he warned, "[Maryland] would take it into their own hands, and make concessions inconsistent with the rights of America." North Carolina, Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York contained many of a similar mind. For Congress to advise Virginia to arrest Lord Dunmore (as Richard Henry Lee had suggested) would be interpreted by such persons as "a renunciation of all connection with Great Britain." The thirteen colonies had, in the course of sixteen months, "been brought to an armed opposition to the claims of Great Britain. . . . If what we have done had been proposed two years ago, four colonies would not have been for it." Suppose a dozen Crown officers were arrested, what would Congress do—hang them?

It was well enough, Lee replied, for Johnson to take this high and judicious view of the matter, but Virginia was in the greatest peril from Dunmore's efforts to stir up a slave revolt. The Massachusetts militia had been supported in their siege of Boston. Was Virginia less worthy of the backing of Congress? Dr. Zubly was up at once to reprobate those who wished to break off with Great Britain. Anyone who made such a suggestion in Georgia would be torn to pieces. A republican government would be the consequence of such a step and "a republican government," he declared, "is little better than [a] government of devils."[34] He felt sure that the winter would bring a reconciliation. George Wythe answered Zubly's fears directly. Every man in Great Britain was already convinced by the battles of Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill "that we are aiming at an independency of Great Britain." As for the fear that any final rupture would cause a defection, he could not speak for the other colonies but the great majority of Virginians would welcome such a step.

A proposal from Rhode Island to build an American fleet occasioned another hot exchange. To Samuel Chase it was "the maddest idea in the world. . . . We should mortgage the whole continent." It was better to use the money to fortify harbors and rivers. But if American resistance to Great Britain was to be maintained, Congress must provide for a fleet of some kind. The matter was put off until tempers cooled and some calm thought could be taken.

At a number of colonial ports, the royal customs officials continued to exercise their offices. The radicals wanted to dismiss these officials and place the regulation of trade under the control of Congress and the individual colonies. John Jay protested such a step. It would mean the end of all trade with England. Because a man had lost the teeth on one side of his jaw was no reason, he declared, to pull out those on the other. If New York could make money, why should it not do so and help thereby to support a less fortunate colony? But the tide of debate ran strongly in favor of placing the trade of all the colonies on the same footing.

Thomas McKean of Delaware, who stated that he too had reconciliation in view, nonetheless expressed his opinion that the ministry would soon in effect place the favored colonies on the same footing as the others and that it would reflect more credit upon them if they were to align themselves with their sister states. Again Zubly objected and Samuel Chase, always irascible, declared that if the Georgian's advice was followed "we shall all be made slaves. If he speaks the opinion of Georgia," he continued hotly, "I sincerely lament that they ever appeared in Congress. They cannot, they will not comply! Why did they come here? Sir we are deceived! Sir we are abused! . . . Did they come here to ruin America?" At this attack, Houstoun, Zubly's fellow Georgian, implied that he would challenge Chase to a duel, if the latter did not enjoy the immunity of Congress.[35]

After three weeks of debate on the matter of trade, Livingston moved that the whole issue he postponed; Jay, still fighting to preserve the favored position of his colony, supported him, but the motion was defeated and the debate went on. Jay, protesting against giving colonial assemblies the right to grant special licenses, made a pertinent point: "We have more to expect from the enterprise, activity and industry of private adventurers than from the lukewarmness of assemblies. We want French woolens, Dutch worsteds, duck for tents, German steel, etc. Public virtue is not so active as private love of gain. Shall we shut the door against private enterprise?"[36] he asked the delegates. Wythe added that he could see no point in restraining what little trade could be carried on. "My opinion is," he said, "[that] we had better open our trade altogether." America must have a navy regardless of the cost. "No maritime power near the sea coast can be safe without it. It is no chimera. The Romans suddenly built one in their Carthaginian war. Why may not we lay a foundation for it? . . . America is one of the wings upon which the British eagle has soared to the skies." Another humble petition from Congress might be received genially with the promise to lay it before Parliament, he concluded, but Americans could expect no success from it. "Have they ever condescended to take notice of you?" he asked. All the colonies had received was "rapine, depopulation, burning, murder."[37]

Finally Congress resolved that "no produce of the United Colonies be exported . . . before the first day of March next, without the permission or order of Congress," and further that New York, North Carolina and

Georgia should surrender their privileged status and suspend all trade with Great Britain.

Adams solicited Warren's own opinions in the matter of continental trade. He was convinced that even if Congress should "hush the trade of the whole continent" the American people could manage. "If Parliament should build a wall of brass, at low-water mark," he wrote, "we might live and be happy. We must change our habits, our prejudices, our palates, our taste in dress, furniture, equipage, architecture, etc., but we can live and be happy. But the question is whether our people have virtue enough to be mere husbandmen, mechanics and soldiers? That they have not virtue enough to bear it always I take for granted." The questions are how long will they hold out, and what will be the effect on the British economy? If American ships are turned loose to trade where they will, how many will escape capture by British frigates?

It was Adams' conviction that if the sea captains and sailors of New England could be set loose they might make considerable inroads into British shipping on their own. He therefore pushed the motion strenuously despite the opposition of the moderates led by Edward Rutledge, who "never displayed so much eloquence" as on this occasion, leading Adams to the cynical conclusion that his arguments were being provided by the conservative merchants of Philadelphia. The South Carolinian "dilated" on the absurdity of the measure. To turn loose an odd lot of small sloops, brigs and ketches, of fishing and trading vessels against the mightiest sea power in the world would be as futile as setting gnats to bring down an elephant. The only result would be to sting Britain to acts of retaliation. Moreover, to allow the taking of prizes would "ruin the character and corrupt the morals of all our seamen," making them "selfish, piratical, mercenary, bent wholly on plunder."

For the moment Rutledge's objections prevailed. The ports remained closed and Adams, blocked here, turned his attention to the problem of establishing an American navy. An opportunity to move in that direction was offered when a Captain Manley requested Washington to be allowed to mount guns on his ship in order to seize some British coasting vessels. Washington forwarded the request to Congress, which had already received word on October 5 that two British sloops which might be intercepted had sailed from Canada loaded with arms and powder for the British in Boston. Congress at once appointed a committee, consisting of John Langdon, Silas Deane and John Adams, to report "immediately" to Congress on a plan of action. Here was an opportunity that Adams welcomed. Guided by him, the committee promptly "recommended vessels."

Not only should steps be taken to intercept the two brigs but the General should solicit Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island to turn over to him for commissioning vessels armed and supplied to prey upon

British shipping, and the "master, officers and seamen of such vessels should be entitled to one half of the value of the prizes by them taken, the wages they receive from the respective colonies notwithstanding."

The debate on the report was a heated one. The moderates put up stubborn resistance. Such a step would carry Congress another long step toward a final and irreconcilable rupture with the Mother Country. To seize a British vessel on the high seas would enrage the ministry and the English people; it would be an aggressive and warlike act quite different from the siege of Boston. But Adams and the radicals carried the day by a narrow margin. John took the victory as his own and marked the day as the humble beginning of an American navy. Three weeks later Congress passed a resolution providing for the purchase and equipping of three vessels "to be employed . . . for the protection and defense of the united colonies." Again Adams was on the so-called "naval committee" charged with actualizing the instructions of Congress and launching the navy. It met every evening at six o'clock in a rented room. Adams found the other members of the naval committee congenial. With Lee he had concerted a hundred schemes to carry Congress along the road to independence. Gadsden had a spirit and temper as warm as Adams', while Stephen Hopkins, Governor of Rhode Island, a man in his seventies, contributed greatly, from his long experience as merchant and citizen of a maritime state, to the committee's deliberations, but even more with his "wit, anecdotes, science, and learning" to their moments of relaxation. After hours of close work, Hopkins, sipping Jamaica rum diluted with water, would entertain the company with reflections on Greek, Roman and British history, with Pope, Milton and Thomson. "The flow of his soul," Adams wrote, "made all his reading our own, and seemed to bring to recollection in all of us, all we had ever read." With such inspiration the committee seasoned its labors by "sense, knowledge and good humor."

The report of the committee recommended that Congress commission privateers to prey on British shipping and set up courts to dispose of prizes. Three days later, on November 28, the delegates approved *Rules for the Regulation of the Navy of the United Colonies of North America.* The regulations and the commissions for privateers framed by Adams, were lengthy and explicit. But Congress put off the measures necessary to give effect to its resolution month after month until Adams despaired of ever seeing a ship launched.

Abigail's letters were precious to John beyond saying. He depended on her for an "hour-to-hour" account of "everything which passes in Boston: . . . How the Tories subsist. . . . Whether the troops are healthy or sickly," and he passed on to Abigail the comment of an Englishman who had visited her at Braintree and declared that she was "the most accomplished lady he had seen since he left England." Recording the compliment, he wrote, "Down vanity." Even excessive pride in one's wife could be displeasing to the Lord.[38] He missed her acutely and yearned to be back at Braintree. "When I shall come home, I know not," he added. "We have so much to do, and it is so difficult to do it right, that we must learn patience. Upon my word, I think if I were to come here again, I must bring you with me. I could live here pleasantly if I had you with me."[39] He envied Hancock, not for his elegant coach with four outriders, but rather the fact that he had his wife with him. John saw in the mischievous gleam in Dorothy Hancock's eyes a reflection of Abigail's look of veiled amusement at some absurdity expressed by one of the company. "Whom God has joined together ought not to be put asunder so long, with their own consent," he wrote. "We will bring master Johnny with us; . . . and we will be as happy as Mr. Hancock and his lady."

For her part the correspondence helped to preserve Abigail's sanity. She could speak through it of her loneliness and anxiety, of her concern for the children's proper training and education and of her devotion to her husband. "My pen," she wrote, "is always freer than my tongue. I have written many things to you that I suppose I never could have talked. My heart is made tender by repeated affliction; it never was a hard heart."

One effect of the intercepted letter to Warren was to make John brief and guarded in his epistles to Abigail, especially in regard to continental politics. "Pray, bundle up every paper, not already hid, and conceal them in impenetrable darkness," he warned her. Certain things he could discuss—the education of the children for instance—and on this subject he wrote at length. "Pray, my dear, let them be taught geography, and the art of copying as well as drawing plans of cities, provinces, kingdoms and countries—especially of America. I have found great inconvenience for want of this art, since I have had to contemplate America so much, and since I had to study the processes and operations of war."[40] But more important than any particular subject was the inculcation in the children of a sense of their duty toward mankind. "My opinion," he wrote Abigail, "of the duties of religion and morality comprehends a very extensive connection with society at large and the great interests of the public." It was the responsibility of the individual to lay himself out to serve his fellow creatures "in promoting and supporting those great political systems and general regulations upon which the happiness of multitudes depends." If the same "benevolence, charity, capacity, and industry" which made a family secure and happy could be expended on a greater scale in support of the principles of virtue and freedom in the political sphere, it "might secure whole nations and generations from misery, want, and contempt." It thus followed that "public virtues and political qualities . . . should be incessantly cherished in our children."[41]

The children, it seemed to their father, all had great natural ability; "capacities equal to anything. There is a vigor in the understanding and a spirit and fire in the temper of every one of them, which is capable of ascending the heights of art, science, trade, war or politics." The children should be given exercises to stimulate their imagination and their powers of description. "Set a child," he wrote, "to form a description of a battle, a storm, a siege, a cloud, a mountain, a lake, a city, a harbor, a country seat, a meadow, a forest, or almost anything that may occur to your thoughts. Set him to compose a narration of all the little incidents and events of a day, a journey, a ride, or a walk." In this way would a style be formed and a taste for the beautiful acquired.[42] Abigail must direct their attention "upon great and glorious objects; root out every little thing. Weed out every meanness. Make them great and manly. Teach them to scorn injustice, ingratitude, cowardice, and falsehood. Let them revere nothing but religion, morality, and liberty." He wished, he wrote, to send "each of my little pretty flock some present or other, and gaped at every shop, like a countryman, to find something, but could not." Abigail should ask them what they wanted. "From this," he added, "I shall judge of their taste and fancy and discretion."[43]

John Adams was convinced that "human nature, with all its infirmities and deprivation," was "still capable of great things." Education was the key. "Education," in Adams' view, made "a greater difference between man and man than nature has made between man and brute. The virtues and powers to which men may be trained, by early education and constant discipline, are truly sublime and astonishing. . . . It should be your care, therefore, and mine," he wrote Abigail, "to elevate the minds of our children and exalt their courage; to accelerate and animate their industry and activity; to excite in them . . . an ambition to excel in every capacity, faculty and virtue. If we suffer their minds to grovel and creep in infancy, they will grovel all their lives."

One thing more that he and Abigail must guard against in the education of their children: an excessive provincialism, an attachment to country, town, parish and family, "often so powerful as to become partial, to blind our eyes, to darken our understandings and pervert our wills." A devotion to place, a rootedness, a consuming passion for the particular earth which had nurtured and sustained him was both Adams' strength and affliction. "It is to this infirmity in my own heart," he wrote Abigail, "that I must perhaps attribute that local attachment, that [particular] fondness, that overweening prejudice in favor of New England which I feel very often, and which, I fear, sometimes leads me to expose myself to just ridicule." The children must be protected against such "local attachment" so far as possible. But then, oh, delight! John, having paid his debt to conscience, went on to enumerate for his wife the particular respects in which New England had "the advantage of every other colony in America, and, indeed, of every other part of the world that I know anything of." The blood of New Englanders was purer English blood; the religious institutions of the section were far more extensive than those of the other colonies; the "public institutions in New England for the education of youth" had their equal nowhere in the world or in history; the township system was a nursery school in democratic principles; the laws of inheritance prevented the accumulation of vast estates and the enrichment of a few at the cost of their relatives and neighbors. The "overweening prejudices" that John had reproached himself for seemed thus to have a solid foundation in the truth. It posed a dilemma that neither he nor Abigail ever entirely solved. Struggle as they might and sadly as their beloved New England disappointed them at times, they lived and died in the conviction that, when all was said and done, it was superior to any other place in the world. Braintree was, of course, the specially blessed spot of that blessed region. One deficiency in his New Englanders Adams would admit. They lacked "art and address," he wrote Abigail. "They want knowledge of the world. They want the exterior and superficial accomplishment of gentlemen, upon which the world sets so high a value." In "solid abilities and real virtues" they excelled all other Americans, yet they were "awkward, bashful . . . pert, ostentatious, and vain; a mixture which excites ridicule and gives disgust." They had not the easy social graces that would set off their sterling qualities to the best advantage; the reason was that they had been too isolated and cut off from the world in general. Adams saw that in his own case his stiff New England manners were a handicap at continental councils, in Congress and in the maneuvering required to get desired action. Samuel Adams was better at it than he, but both were outshone by the affable gentlemen of Virginia or South Carolina, and John was realistic enough to realize how much the machinery of republican politics was lubricated by qualities of personal ingratiation. It was a nice problem. New Englanders were the best trained in the school of popular government, the best educated, the most moral and intelligent. The country needed them desperately if it was to have high-minded and efficient leadership. They must not disqualify themselves by their failure to master the art of easy and pleasant informality, of friendliness, good humor and accommodation. "These imperfections," he wrote, "must be remedied, for New England must produce the heroes, the statesmen, the philosophers, or America will make no great figure for some time."[44]

Abigail replied to her husband's comments on education by reminding him that those who suffered most severely from the inadequacies of the existing system were the women of the United Colonies. She dared to hope that "some more liberal plan might be laid and executed for the benefit of the rising generation. . . . If we mean to have heroes, statesmen and philosophers," she wrote, "we should have learned women."

The world might laugh at her and accuse her of vanity, but John, she knew, had "a mind too enlarged and liberal to disregard the sentiment. If much depends, as is allowed, upon the early education of youth, and the first principles which are instilled take the deepest root, great benefit must arise from literary accomplishments in women."

"Your sentiments of the importance of education in women are exactly agreeable to my own," Adams replied. In history there was hardly an instance of a great man who did not have about him some unusual woman, mother, wife or sister to whom, in a large measure, he owed his eminence.[45]

In the fall of 1775 a threat more terrible than war fastened on Braintree: smallpox and a devastating form of dysentery swept it and the neighboring towns, carrying off children and old people by the score, sometimes three or four in a family. Abigail was so hard hit by dysentery that she could barely stand. Tommy, desperately ill, wanted only his mother to nurse him and Abigail dragged herself to his bed to give him what comfort she could. Pastor Wibird was ill, the Belcher and Bracket children were not expected to live. "So sickly and so mortal a time the oldest man does not remember," Abigail wrote, asking John to send her, at the first opportunity, an ounce of turkey rhubarb, a quarter pound of nutmegs, one ounce of cloves, two of cinnamon, and one ounce of Indian root, so that she could make up some medicine. By the end of the month Tommy had recovered but was thin as a rail. Abigail had regained much of her strength, but Patty, the maid, was in a decline and Abigail's own mother near death, so that she had to travel between Weymouth and Braintree from one sickbed to another. So extreme was the crisis that Braintree went for four Sundays without any meeting, a lapse unprecedented in the town's history. Despite Abigail's devoted nursing, her mother died. It was a bitter, bitter blow to the daughter. Sitting, worn and exhausted, by her mother's bedside, she was overwhelmed by her sense of loss. Mrs. William Smith, nee Elizabeth Quincy, had been a faithful wife and devoted parent. She had nursed Abigail through a sickly youth with boundless tenderness and patience; to her she had transmitted her own small but fine stock of learning endowed with love; she had given to Abigail the principles that guided her life and thought, along with the grace of spirit, the wit and penetration of mind that marked the daughter as her mother's child. In her anguish, Abigail cried out to John in the familiar cadences of the Scriptures: "Have pity upon me. Have pity upon me, O thou my beloved, for the hand of God presseth me sore. Yet will I be dumb and silent and not open my mouth, because Thou, O Lord, hast done it. . . . At times I am almost ready to faint under this severe and heavy stroke, separated from *thee*, who used to be a comforter to me in affliction; but blessed be God, His ear is not heavy that He cannot hear, but He has bid us call upon him in time of trouble. . . . Almighty God! restrain the pestilence which walketh in darkness and wasteth at noonday, and which laid in the dust one of the dearest of parents."[46]

John offered what comfort he could. "I bewail, more than I can express, the loss of your excellent mother," the more especially since her excellent example and precept would be lost to their children. Good and kind as a mother might be, there was in the economy of the family no substitute for the experience and wisdom of a grandmother.

In Braintree the epidemic continued to ravage the community. Abigail, writing John a few weeks after her mother's death, painted a grim picture. In six weeks she had lost five "near connections, laid in the grave. . . . I cannot overcome my too selfish sorrow," she added. "Yea, though He slay me, I will trust in Him, said holy Job. What though His corrective hand hath been stretched against me; I will not murmur."[47]

The death of his mother-in-law and Abigail's distress were seldom out of Adams' mind. They provided a somber and depressing background for his daily concern with the fate of his colony and country. "We have few hopes," he wrote her, "excepting that of preserving our honor and our consciences unstained, and a free constitution to our country. Let us be sure of these, and, amidst all my weaknesses, I cannot be overcome. With these I can be happy in extreme poverty, in humble insignificance [a most doubtful proposition] . . . I hope and believe, in death." His mother-in-law's untimely death was a reminder of the precariousness of all life. "The tremendous calamities already felt of fire, sword, and pestilence may be only harbingers of greater still," he declared. "We have no security against calamity here. This planet is its region. The only principle is to be prepared for the worst events. . . . If I could write as well as you, my sorrow would be as eloquent as yours, but, upon my word, I cannot."[48]

Abigail fretted about lack of news from Philadelphia just as in the Quaker city John fretted over the trickle of reports from the northward. "I wish," she wrote, "I knew what mighty things were fabricating. If a form of government is to be established here, what one will be assumed? Will it be left to our assemblies to choose one? And will not many men have many minds? And shall we not run into dissensions among ourselves?" Abigail, as she viewed the course of events and the behavior of her neighbors under the stress of an undeclared war, was "more and more convinced that man is a dangerous creature; and that power, whether vested in many or a few, is ever grasping, and, like the grave, cries, 'Give, give!' The great fish swallow up the small; and he who is most strenuous for the rights of the people, when vested with power, is as eager after the prerogatives of government." Here was a reversal of roles: John arguing for at least "degrees of perfection" to be achieved through education, and Abigail reminding him of the deceitfulness of the human heart and the infrequency with which even rather modest degrees of perfection were obtained. The reins of government, she wrote, "have been so long slackened that I fear the people will not quietly submit to those restraints which are necessary for the peace and security of the community." If the colonies asserted their independence, where would authority and the force of equitable laws have their foundation? "How shall we be governed," she asked, "so as to retain our liberties? . . . Who shall frame these laws? Who will give them force and energy? . . . When I consider these things . . . I feel anxious for the fate of our monarchy, or democracy, or whatever is to take place." Bending her thoughts to such problems, she felt lost "in a labyrinth of perplexities" and must needs fall back on her faith that justice and righteousness would somehow be the guideposts of the nation, "and order rise out of confusion. . . . I believe I have tired you with politics," she concluded. Tired him she had not. He was, as she well knew he would be, charmed with her political disquisition. Were she in Congress she would put many of his learned and assertive colleagues to shame as a political scientist.[49]

Preoccupation with family did not allay her loneliness for her husband. She had suffered from a combination of "jaundice, rheumatism and a most violent cold" for which she had taken a puke "which . . . relieved me and I feel much better today." John's little niece, his dead brother's daughter, was a member of the Braintree household and another body, however small, to be fitted into the cramped quarters of the little farmhouse. The children missed their father almost as acutely as Abigail herself, though Tommy had gotten it fixed in his mind that his father was engaged in a great battle and would not be home until it was over.[50]

Franklin, it will be recalled, was one of the congressional commissioners appointed to confer with Washington at Cambridge about the establishment of a Continental Army. Before the commissioners left for Philadelphia, Abigail dined at Colonel Quincy's with the sage, "whose character," she wrote John, "from my infancy I had been taught to venerate." She found the great man "social but not talkative . . . grave, yet pleasant and affable," full of "useful" observations. "I thought," she added, "I could read in his countenance the virtues of his heart, among which patriotism shone in its full luster, and with that is blended every virtue of a Christian: for a true patriot must be a religious man." Franklin urged her to come to Philadelphia to spend the winter and Abigail was tempted by the thought. "I have been like a nun in a cloister, ever since you went away," she wrote John. "My evenings are lonesome and melancholy," full of sad reflections on her mother's death and anxieties about John.[51]

She wrote John asking for a copy of Lord Chesterfield's letters, a book which was being much talked of in Boston, but John replied primly that Abigail would not want to have such a work in her library. The letters were, like Congreve's plays, "stained with libertine morals and base principles."[52] Knowing his preoccupation with independence, Abigail could not resist teasing him a little. When Congress took up the question of independence for the colonies, might they not quite properly consider at the same time the independence of women? A new code of laws should not put "such unlimited power into the hands of husbands." Since all men "would be tyrants if they could, particular care and attention should be paid to the rights of the ladies who might otherwise "foment a rebellion, and . . . not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation."[53]

John's reply was hardly encouraging. "I cannot but laugh," he answered. "We have been told that our struggle has loosened the bonds of government everywhere; that children and apprentices were disobedient; that schools and colleges were grown turbulent; that Indians slighted their guardians, and Negroes grew insolent to their masters. But your letter was the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented. This is rather too coarse a compliment," John added, "but you are so saucy, I won't blot it out." As Abigail well knew, masculine domination was more in theory than in fact. "We are obliged to go fair and softly, and, in practice, you know we are the subjects. We have only the name of masters, and rather than give up this, which would completely subject us to the despotism of the petticoat, I hope General Washington and all our brave heroes would fight." John and his fellow congressmen would stand fast as long as they could against despotism, empire, monarchy, aristocracy, or ochlocracy. Indeed he suspected that the British ministry was responsible. Having to no avail stirred up Tories, land jobbers, bigots, Canadians, Indians, Negroes, Hessians, Russians, Irish Roman Catholics and Scotch renegades, the ministers had at last inflamed the most dangerous group of all—the ladies.[54]

Abigail, trying to recruit Mercy Warren for her campaign to get Congress to pass laws which would "put it out of the power of the arbitrary and tyrannic to injure us with impunity by establishing some laws in our favor upon just and liberal principles," told her friend that John had replied to her request in a haughty and imperious way and that she would take the occasion to inform him that she had simply been testing "the disinterestedness of his virtue [which], when weighted in the balance," she had found wanting. To John himself she wrote, "I cannot say that I think you are very generous to the ladies; for, whilst you are proclaiming peace and good will to men, emancipating all nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives." But arbitrary power, like other hard things, is apt to be broken, and "notwithstanding all your wise laws and maxims, we have it in our power, not only to free ourselves, but to subdue our master, and, without violence, throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet."[55]

XVII

CONGRESS addressed itself to the military establishment and here showed a burst of energy, providing for the recruitment, supply, training and regulation of an army of twenty thousand men "intended to lie before Boston." John was delighted at such display of resolution and wrote to Warren that he "expected to see the principles of liberty spread and prevail so rapidly, human nature exerting her whole rights, unshackled by priests or kings or nobles, pulling down tyrannies like Samson, and building up what government the people think best framed for human felicity."[1]

October 18, the delegates from New Hampshire, prompted, Adams guessed, by John Sullivan, asked Congress to recommend "a method for our administering justice and regulating our civil police." Again Adams, as he had in June, seized the opportunity to harangue the delegates on the necessity of recommending to the states that they establish governments of their own. There were innumerable disadvantages, he pointed out, to the present ambiguous and confusing status of the colonies. Indeed, they were no longer colonies at all, for Great Britain by making war on them had, in effect, cast them out. They must now be states. To continue suspended between dependence and independence, neither flesh nor fowl, subjected them to the inconveniences of both with the advantages of neither. The whole matter of trade, involving as it did relations with other powers, was hopelessness complicated by the anomalous position of the—what should he say, colonies or states? union or confederation? or temporary association?

When Adams had finished his speech he was subjected to a barrage of questions. How could the people institute governments? Where, in history, had there been examples of governments fashioned by the people themselves? If a convention fabricated a government what assurance would there be that the people would accept it? The whole project seemed chimerical; it introduced a host of disturbing reflections and raised in a most tangible form that final dreadful specter of independence.

What kind of government did Adams have in mind when he spoke so glibly of establishing them?

"A plan as nearly resembling the government under which we were born, and have lived, as the circumstances of the country will admit," Adams replied. A king would not do, nor would nobles. There was no precedent for any hereditary descent in titles and the temper of the people was uncongenial to any such innovation. But a government of three branches ought to be preserved—the classic form of executive, legislative and judicial—already represented by the governors, the colonial assemblies and the justices. The legislature, moreover, was traditionally and properly made up of a council and a lower house in every colony except Pennsylvania.

The delegates shied away. The matter was postponed a day, then two and three, until at last on Thursday, October 26, Congress picked it up in a gingerly fashion and Adams was supported by John Rutledge, Richard Henry Lee, Christopher Gadsden, Roger Sherman and Eliphalet Dyer. For more than a week the committee labored over a report which recommended to New Hampshire the calling of "a full and free representation of the people . . . [to] establish such a form of government as in their judgment will best produce the happiness of the people, and most effectually secure peace and good order in the Province, during the continuance of the present dispute between Great Britain and the colonies." Adams was not entirely satisfied with the result. There were those wretched words "Province" and "colonies"; the dogged assumption that the bitter contest was merely a temporary misunderstanding, soon to be reconciled. Adams had to be satisfied with prying the phrase "Mother Country"—(certainly an offense to the institution of motherhood)—out of the final draft. But the report was, nonetheless, "a triumph," "a most important point gained," and John Rutledge sought to impart a little more momentum to the movement toward independence by bringing in a similar request in the name of South Carolina. When the latter report was submitted, Adams tried once more to prevail upon the delegates to send out a general recommendation to all the states to establish their own governments. His motion was met again with interrogations as to the kind of government the respective colonies should frame. Was it not dangerous, in the absence of any carefully digested plan, any model or recommendation from Congress, to set every state to work on its own version of a proper constitution? Adams confessed the point was well taken. While he could offer "offhand a variety of short sketches of plans," a more carefully matured and balanced scheme was obviously called for. The opportunity was irresistible to a philosopher-politician, and Adams, his head full of Harrington, Sidney, Hobbes and Locke, as well as a dozen continental theorists, set to work to put his own views of government in order.

In the discussion following the defeat of Adams' motion, Richard Henry Lee requested his Massachusetts colleague to address to him some of his ideas concerning the basic principles of republican government. In his reply, written on the fifteenth of November 1775, Adams put the case most explicitly for a government of three equal, balanced branches. It was only by balancing the legislative, executive and judicial powers, each against the other two, that the tendency inherent in all governments to turn into a tyranny could be checked and freedom preserved.

It seemed plain enough that the people should choose by suffrage a House of Commons. The House should then choose from its members a Council of from twelve to twenty-eight members and the House and Council together should select a Governor. Governor, House and Council should be independent of each other and have a negative over the action of the other branches. The officers and magistrates of the state should be chosen by the Governor, "by and with the advice and consent of his Council." The Governor or executive should command the army and militia, and the judges serve during good behavior. Such a system, if adopted, could in a month bring about, "without the least convulsion, or even animosity . . . a total revolution in the government of a colony." By adopting some such plan, Adams added, "human nature would appear in its proper glory, asserting its own real dignity, pulling down tyrannies at a single exertion, and erecting such new fabrics as it thinks best calculated to promote its happiness."

Adams' activities in and out of Congress were hampered by the behavior of Paine who, tormented by family problems, had, as Adams put it, "taken an odd turn in his head of late, and is . . . peevish, passionate & violent." The two men, never really congenial, clashed repeatedly until Adams finally swore to avoid further altercations.

By the end of November, Adams felt that he had accomplished all that was possible at the moment. The army had been provided for, a start had been made with a navy, New Hampshire and South Carolina had been advised to establish their own governments, the issue of regulation of trade had been settled at least for the moment, and it was apparent that Congress had no intention of proceeding at any precipitant pace toward independence. He began to think more and more impatiently of his return to Braintree. But Sam Adams talked him out of going home. He was needed in Congress at that very moment to try to push through an enlistment bounty.

The bounty was tied up with the general problem of wages for officers and enlisted men in the Continental Army, and this in turn reflected the very different social systems of the North and the South. As Joseph Hawley put it, there was "a strange mistaken opinion . . . among the gentlemen of the army from the southward, and if I mistake not, in your Congress, that our privates have too high wages, and the officers too low."[2] To the Southern aristocrats the gentlemen officers were deserving of far higher wages than the plebeian privates and noncommissioned officers. For the New Englanders the reverse was true. Enlisted men, who in many instances were the social equals of their officers and in some their superiors, were jealous of any wage differential. Moreover, this jealousy extended to the functions of command among the New Englanders so that the discipline and the military subordination essential to the proper functioning of an army were often in short supply. The pay for enlisted men seemed too high to the Southerners and too low to the New Englanders. Conversely, the pay of the officers seemed much too high to the Northerners. "I expect ours, when they come to know the pay of the general officers and others, will grumble," Adams had written. He and Sam and Robert Treat Paine had fought against it but in vain. "It is amazingly high," he added, "but the Southern geniuses think it vastly too low."[3]

The New Englanders, hoping to equalize the remuneration of officers and privates, pressed for an enlistment bounty. But Congress refused and only approved "after much altercation" forty shillings lawful money per month. "The utmost that could be done has been done," Adams wrote Joseph Hawley. "We cannot suddenly alter the temper, principles, opinions, or prejudices of men." The character and outlook of New England upper classes differed as much from those of other colonies as the respective characters of their common people; "that is," Adams observed, "as much as several distinct nations almost," adding, "Gentlemen, men of sense, of any kind of education, in the other colonies are much fewer in proportion than in New England."

In the Southern colonies gentlemen were masters of large plantations while "the common people among them are very ignorant and very poor." The plantation owners were "accustomed, habituated, to higher notions of themselves and the distinction between them and the common people than we are." Adams dreaded the "consequences of this dissimilitude of character." Without the utmost caution and forbearance on both sides, it must split the colonies and destroy the cause. The formation of constitutions in the respective states would, when that event took place, draw them closer together. But at present the vague and ill-defined union trembled in the balance, liable to be upset by any shift in its delicate equilibrium. In Adams' opinion, it was the most hazardous moment since the representatives of the various colonies had assembled for the first time in Philadelphia, some eighteen months earlier. "For God's sake, therefore," he wrote Hawley, who wished for bounties, "reconcile our people to what has been done, for you may depend upon it that nothing more can be done here. . . . It is very hard to be linked and yoked eternally with people," he complained, "who have either no opinions or opposite opinions, and to be plagued with the opposition of our own colony to the most necessary measures, at the same time that you have all the monarchial superstition and the aristocratical domination of nine other colonies to contend with."[4]

The truth was that Southerners with their aristocratic principles and manners had begun to impose a severe strain on Adams' temper. He was inclined to blame their fear of a republican government for the reluctance of Congress to cut the last ties that bound the colonies to England. "All our misfortunes," he wrote Horatio Gates, "arise from a single source, the reluctance of the Southern colonies to republican government. The success of this war depends upon a skillfull steerage of the political vessel. The difficulties lie in forming constitutions for particular colonies, and a continental constitution for the whole. . . . This can only be done on popular principles and maxims which are so abhorrent to the inclinations of the barons of the South, and the proprietary interests in the middle colonies, as well as to that avarice of land which has made upon this continent so many votaries to Mammon that I sometimes dread the consequences. However, patience, fortitude and perseverance with the help of time will get us over these obstructions." The thirteen colonies "under such a form of government as that of Connecticut, or one not quite so popular," leagued together, could "bid defiance to all the potentates of Europe," he declared.[5]

Abigail, to whom he had confided his growing resentment toward the Southerners, wrote of Virginia, "Are not the gentry lords, and the common people vassals? . . . I hope their riflemen, who have shown themselves very savage and even bloodthirsty, are not a specimen of the geniality of the people. I am willing to allow the colony great merit for having produced a Washington."[6] John agreed with Abigail. In Virginia, he wrote, "the gentry are very rich, and the common people very poor. This inequality of property gives an aristocratical turn to all their proceedings." However, he enjoyed a minor triumph in securing commissions as artillery officers for two loyal Boston Sons of Liberty, the painter Thomas Crafts and jeweler George Trott. It galled the Southerners that the two prospective majors were simply city artisans and that the "esquires" appended to their names in the journals of Congress had been bestowed on them for the occasion by John himself. In spite of Adams' prodding, Congress would go no further than to suggest their commissioning to Washington if it would cause "no disturbance and disgust in the regiment." Adams wrote to Warren that if the two men were not appointed, "I shall be very mad, and kick and bounce like fury."[7] He simply could not reconcile himself to the idea that a man's position in the world was determined by his birth and family connections. The army needed good officers too desperately for Congress to quibble about their social standing. Merit, not social position, was the only proper standard.

Quite suddenly in the first week of December, Adams decided to ask leave from Congress to return home. Virginia had applied for and received permission to set up its own government in opposition to Lord Dunmore; the King's proclamation declaring the resisting colonists to be rebels and his threats of retribution had been answered in a bold spirit; the matter of Washington's control over the New England militia had been settled in favor of the authority of the states, and for the moment no pressing issue faced the delegates. As a member of the Council of the Massachusetts Assembly, Adams had been filled with apprehension at the news that the Council and lower house were at swords' points. Perhaps he could make peace between the two bodies and prevent the disgrace of a protracted brawl that would draw unfavorable attention and rejuvenate the Massachusetts Tories. The critical ground, at least as far as Adams was concerned, seemed to have shifted from Philadelphia to Watertown.

With Fessenden he set out on Saturday morning for the long journey back to Braintree. The December air was mild and their horses slipped and stumbled in the mud as they rode out through the Northern Liberties to dine at the Red Lion Tavern and then press on to Bristol. John was so impatient to be home that he broke one of his most stringent rules and traveled on Sunday, stopping at Trenton and then riding on to Princeton to visit with Dr. Witherspoon. So by forced marches he made it back to Braintree in a little more than ten days, averaging almost forty miles a day, visiting briefly with patriots along the way and taking the pulse of the country.

It was a joy to be with Abigail again. They had months of talking to do in a few short days. She was insatiable in her demand for news—every man and every issue must pass in review and all the secrets that John's letters could not contain must now be spread out for her delectation. Tommy was delighted that the battle was over and Papa home at last. Even at the age of five Charles was quite the handsomest member of a handsome family. With soft, curly brown hair, long lashes and a bright happy face, he had those gifts of the spirit which in comparison make most mortals seem dull and lumpish, and that seem to give their possessors a charmed and charming life.

While Adams was in Braintree he engaged in an exchange with Mercy Warren upon the nature of political man. Politics was, simply stated, "the science of human happiness." The question was which form of government, monarchy or republic, would best insure the happiness of the governed. "Monarchy," he wrote, "is the genteelest and most fashionable government, and I don't know why the ladies ought not to consult elegance and the fashion as well in governments as gowns, bureaus or chariots. . . . For my own part," he added, "I am so tasteless as to prefer a republic, if we must erect an independent government in America, which you know," he added ironically, "is utterly against my inclination."

A republic, while it would doubtless leave him poor, would produce "strength, hardiness, activity, courage, fortitude and enterprise; the manly noble and sublime qualities in human nature in abundance"; but a monarchy would result in "so much taste, so much elegance in dress, furniture, equipage, so much music and dancing, so much fencing and skating, so much cards and backgammon, so much horse racing and cockfighting, so many balls and assemblies, so many plays and concerts that the very imagination of them makes me feel vain, light, frivolous and insignificant." Under a "well-regulated commonwealth the people must be wise, virtuous, and cannot be otherwise," while "under a monarchy . . . they cannot but be vicious and foolish." Yet it was by no means a simple matter to erect and sustain a republic. There was the matter of human nature to contend with.

To maintain a republic required virtue and simplicity "among all order and degrees of men." But unfortunately there was "so much rascality, so much venality and corruption, so much avarice and ambition, such a rage for profit and commerce among all ranks and degrees of men even in America," that he sometimes doubted whether there was virtue enough to support a republican government. He was disturbed by a tendency to be servile and obsequious that he observed in some Americans. "A genuine republican," he wrote, "can no more fawn and cringe than he can domineer." But a great politician was great by virtue of his ability to draw out the best in the people who acknowledged him as their leader, in short "to make the character of his people, to extinguish among them the follies and vices that he sees, and to create in them the virtues and abilities which he sees wanting."[8]

Mrs. Warren, like some other spokesmen for the popular cause, was too much inclined to depend upon the goodness of the human heart in setting up a government. She thus favored a single legislative body and a weak and subordinate executive. Adams, in correcting her political science, supplemented his arguments with a fulsome compliment (hoping perhaps to check the spread of a spirit of rebellion from Abigail to Mercy): "Ladies," he wrote, "are the greatest politicians that I have the honor to be acquainted with, not only because they act upon the sublimest of all the principles of policy, viz., that honesty is the best policy, but because they consider questions more coolly than those heated with party zeal and inflamed with the bitter contentions of public life."

Almost from the beginning of the contest with Great Britain, Adams had thought "it the most difficult and dangerous part of business Americans have to do in this mighty contest, to contrive some method for the colonies to glide insensibly from under the old government into a peaceable and contented submission to new ones. . . . My constant endeavor has been," he maintained, "to convince gentlemen of the necessity of turning their thoughts to these subjects. At present, the sense of this necessity seems to be general, and measures are taken which must terminate in a complete revolution. There is danger of convulsions but, I hope, not great ones."

The principles of government which Mercy admired were admirable ones; the only difficulty was that they were too idealistic—they did not correspond to the realities of political life—"its principles are as easily destroyed as human nature is corrupted." Again virtue must underlie all institutional arrangements if they are to be healthy and enduring. "There must be a positive passion for the public good, the public interest, honor, power and glory, established in the minds of the people, or there can be no republican government, nor any real liberty; and this public passion must be superior to all private passions. Men must be ready, they must pride themselves, and be happy to sacrifice their private pleasures, passions and interests, nay, their private friendships and dearest connections, when they stand in competition with the rights of society." Heretofore in all of history few nations have possessed a sufficiency of such qualities. "Our dear Americans perhaps have as much of it as any nation now existing, and New England perhaps has more than the rest of America. But," he added, "I have seen all my life such selfishness and littleness even in New England, that I sometimes tremble to think that, although we are engaged in the best cause that ever employed the human heart, yet the prospect of success is doubtful not for want of power or of wisdom but of virtue." It is the "spirit of commerce" which, above all, "corrupts the morals of families" and which, it is much to be feared, is incompatible with that purity of heart and greatness of soul which is necessary for a happy republic. But New England is one of the most enterprising commercial regions of the world. Does this mean that a republican form of government is impossible there? Or that it will of necessity be "factious and turbulent?" No, only that the greatest caution and wisest statecraft must be exercised. "We must move slowly. Patience, patience, patience! I am obliged to invoke this every morning of my life, every noon and every evening." As for Mercy's hint that if England and America were reconciled, John would be made a duke or a lord, he assured her that he had "neither principles, nor address, nor abilities for such scenes."[9]

It is worth pointing out here that Adams was converting into secular political terms the Puritan concept of sin. Self-interest is the political or secular equivalent of original sin. Public spirit is sanctification. John Adams' fear was that natural human impulses would threaten the holy experiment, the new republic which was to be like a city set upon a hill, a political model that all who observed it might be instructed and pattern their own governments upon it. The point is worth emphasizing because casual historians of America's past and orators upon patriotic occasions have not infrequently evoked the spirit of Adam Smith and declared that enlightened self-interest and economic individualism were the basic tenets of the country at the moment of its birth. Adams' Puritan ancestors had insisted that they were engaged in an effort to establish a new and purified kind of religious community founded on the teachings of the Bible and the precepts of John Calvin. Adams, in a similar spirit, insisted that he and his contemporaries were concerned with establishing a new and purified kind of political community, founded on the Christian religion and the precepts of John Locke and James Harrington among others.

At Braintree there was time to talk, not enough to be sure, and to review and ratify Abigail's management of the farm. After Christmas John rode to Cambridge headquarters for another inspection of the army and then took his seat with the Council at Watertown. He was at once up to his neck in provincial politics, conferring with members of both houses, describing the situation in Congress, urging patience, explaining the touchiness of the Southerners and the apprehensions of those "moderates" or wishful thinkers who still clung to the hope of reconciliation. He petitioned once more for release from the Massachusetts delegation. He had already asked Warren to use his influence in the Provincial Assembly to have him replaced. He must devote his time and energy to making the farm remunerative. "By retreating from public life," he wrote, "in some measure I might preserve myself and family from ruin. I am willing to sink with my country, but it ought not to be insisted on that I should sink myself without any prospect of contributing by that means to make it swim. . . . I am pushing rapidly into perplexities and distresses in my private affairs from which I can never extricate myself," he concluded.

However, his sure and incisive analysis of the parties and factions in the Continental Congress served only to convince the Assembly that he was indispensable as a representative of the colony. The truth of the matter was that his own protestations of having served his time were clearly halfhearted. There was no prospect for the moment of establishing the Superior Court; there was no law business to speak of; his age, health and lack of experience precluded his securing a military commission. The farm, despite his declarations that he wished for nothing more in life than to labor in its tranquil fields and meadows, could not have held him long. His destiny was clearly to be a revolutionary politician and his efforts to escape his fate were mere formal gestures of piety intended to assure himself and others that he was pure in heart and did not lust after office and power for their own sake.

At Cambridge, Washington flattered Adams by asking his advice about a proposal of General Lee's to send part of the Boston army to New York to secure that city against any attempt by the Tories or the British to hold it in opposition to the patriots. The General was not sure whether his own authority extended to such a campaign, but Adams assured him that it did. Securing New York was of "vast importance . . . as it is the *nexus* of the northern and southern colonies . . . a kind of key to the whole continent. . . . That New York is within your command, as much as the Massachusetts, cannot bear a question."[10]

Actually his impatience to be back in Philadelphia was increased by a letter from his cousin informing him that New Hampshire, having been encouraged by Congress to set up a government of her own devising, had replied with quite gratuitous assurances that while they were ready to establish a temporary government they had not the remotest notion of seeking independence. They thus displayed, in Samuel's mind, "a servility and baseness of soul for which language doth not afford an epithet." In addition, a motion had been made in Congress "that, whereas we had been charged with aiming at independency, a committee should be appointed to explain to the people at large the principles and grounds of our opposition. . . ." Such a motion, if approved, could only cast doubts on the determination of Congress to maintain its resistance to the armies and navies of His Majesty. It would represent a step backward. Far better to keep silent and let the inexorable logic of events themselves carry the united colonies to the point where there could be, at last, no turning back. Samuel Adams and a few of his allies had managed to postpone the unfortunate motion which, along with New Hampshire's avowals of loyalty to the Crown, would "wholly defeat a design" which "S. Adams" confessed he had much at heart.[11] Indeed, Samuel and George Wythe agreed that a confederation "must soon be brought on, and that if all the colonies could not come into it, it had better be done by those of them that inclined to it." Samuel had assured his Virginia ally that he would do his best "to unite the New England colonies in confederating, if *none* of the rest would join in it." To this Wythe had replied that if Samuel succeeded, Virginia could be counted on to come along. If John needed anything to reconcile him to a return to Philadelphia, this call to battle served the purpose. As impatient for independence as Samuel, he was at the same time more cautious and more concerned that the façade of intercolonial unity not be shattered by any hasty action.

XVIII

On January 25, John Adams set off once more for Philadelphia. His journey was prefaced by a visit to Cambridge to dine with Colonel Mifflin and his lady and with General and Mrs. Washington. The meal was much enlivened by six or seven savage chieftains, several of them accompanied by their squaws and a passel of children. They grunted and snorted over their food like carnivorous animals at their prey, tearing great chunks of half-cooked meat off greasy bones. "Yet," as John noted in his diary, "they were wondrous polite." When Washington introduced Adams to them as one of "the grand council fire at Philadelphia," they rose, took his hand in their dark, sticky paws, shook it solemnly and bowed almost to the ground before the paleface chief. John was charmed with the performance.[1]

The next day Adams and Fessenden departed for "the grand council fire" with Elbridge Gerry. Thomas Cushing had been denied reappointment as a Massachusetts delegate to Congress and the Assembly had replaced him with Gerry. To John it was a most welcome change. Gerry, a gnomish little man with a sharp, shrewd face, long nose and outsize wig, was an old friend and solid patriot. Thoroughly eccentric in his ways, he was the archetype of the small-town politican projected onto a larger stage. Of average talents and a rather unstable temperament, he made up in zeal and transparently good intentions for some of his more conspicuous shortcomings. Perhaps John loved him because he was New England to the bone.

The two friends rode on to Framingham in high spirits, dined at Buckminister's tavern and then, with their host, a militia colonel, serving as guide, they inspected the artillery that Henry Knox had brought down from Fort Ticonderoga, captured most grandly by Ethan Allan in the "name of Jehovah and the Continental Congress." It was an impressive addition to an extremely meager continental artillery. From Framingham they proceeded over the now familiar route—Oxford, Grafton, Woodstock, Pomfret, Windham, Colchester, Durham, New Haven, Milford, Stamford, White Plains, Dobbs Ferry, Hackensack, the last leg across the Jersey flats to Princeton; Trenton, Bristol, and finally, Philadelphia: "a cold journey" of eighteen days over roads sometimes deep in mud, sometimes frozen hard as iron, through snowstorms and cold rain, talking at every stop with tavern-keepers, travelers and prominent local Whigs, collecting and distributing information, knitting together the stouthearted friends of liberty and, above all, enjoying each other's company and conversation, for good talk was better than good wine or good viands; it was refreshment for the soul, food of the mind.

In Philadelphia, John found a somewhat dispirited group of delegates, "a deep anxiety, a kind of thoughtful melancholy." The Southerners especially seemed despondent. Troubles had multiplied rather than diminished and the initial ardor for freedom and justice which had sustained the patriots through the early months of their resistance, and which, continually evoked in debate and oration, had nerved them to resist the weight and might of the Mother Country, had been dulled by the endless labor, the multitudinous, tedious details of administration, the slow corrosion of sectional and personal frictions, and perhaps above all by the ever present tormenting uncertainty over what the future held. "In this or a similar condition," he wrote Abigail, "we shall remain, I think, until late in the spring, when some critical event will take place, perhaps sooner." Only the Almighty, he declared, could foresee "which way the torrent will be turned"; but Adams, without divine omniscience, came close enough. "Judging by experience, by probabilities, and by all appearances, I conclude it will roll on to dominion and glory though the circumstances and consequences may be bloody." Amid such upheavals, "individuals are but atoms. It is scarcely worth while to consider what the consequences will be to us. What will be the effects upon present and future millions, and millions of millions, is a question very interesting to benevolence, natural and Christian. God grant they may, and I firmly believe they will, be happy."[2]

Adams' life was complicated by the continued divisions among the Massachusetts delegates. The feeling between Adams and Robert Treat Paine had been exacerbated by a letter from Warren to Adams containing some slighting references to Paine. John had showed it to Sam and to Hancock but somehow the missive had fallen into Paine's hands. Paine wrote a furious letter to Warren, denouncing the latter's "malevolent disposition" and "implacable temper"; speaking bitterly of Warren's "laboring for my disgrace"; and attacking Adams himself in words that when Abigail read them made her bridle with indignation at the "unjust malicious censures of an unworthy associate."[3] The incident drew Hancock and Paine closer while John, Sam and Elbridge Gerry formed an opposing faction.

One of the heaviest blows to the morale of Congress and of patriots everywhere was the news of the unsuccessful Canadian expedition which had been launched in early fall amid high hopes. The two-pronged invasion, led by General Richard Montgomery and Colonel Benedict Arnold, had been wasted by sickness, bitter cold and rugged terrain until finally a mere handful remained to assail Quebec, the key to control of Canada. The assault was beaten back, Montgomery killed and Arnold badly wounded. This setback had been more than balanced, however, by the publication in Philadelphia of a pamphlet written by a scrofulous, pock-marked English immigrant with a bulbous nose, a fondness for the bottle, and a hot, restless eye, who had abandoned a wife and several small children to cast his lot with the cause of liberty in America. Tom Paine's *Common Sense* did what Congress with all its petitions and proclamations had failed to do: it reached the ordinary colonist who, confused by the uncertainty and hesitation of his betters, read it with a shock of recognition. Congress had left the King as a symbol of the last tie that bound the colonies to Great Britain. By his ringing assault on the King and his creature, Parliament, Paine cut that final cord. Casting off a king, Paine warned, "may at first seem strange and difficult, but like all other steps which we have already passed over, will in a little time become familiar and agreeable; and until an independence is declared, the continent will feel itself like a man who continues putting off some unpleasant business from day to day, yet knows it must be done, hates to set about it, wishes it over, and is continually haunted by the thoughts of its necessity." What was undoubtedly the most influential pamphlet in American history was passed from hand to hand during the winter and spring of 1776—everywhere it made converts to the cause of independence. John and Samuel Adams were delighted with its ringing eloquence, though John thought it contained dubious politics and worse philosophy.

He sent a copy of it off to Abigail promptly and one to Deacon Palmer, who wrote in reply, "I believe no pages was ever more eagerly read, nor more generally approved: People speak of it in rapturous praise."[4] Like Joseph Ward, many who read the pamphlet attributed it to John himself. Ward found *Common Sense* "a glorious performance and I think I see strong marks of *your pen* in it."[5] Abigail professed herself "charmed with its sentiments and wondered how "an honest heart, one who wishes the welfare of his country and the happiness of posterity, can hesitate one moment at adopting them."

William Tudor wrote to Adams that *Common Sense* had been attributed both to him and to Dr. Franklin. It was being read with "great avidity," Tudor reported. "The doctrine it holds up is calculated for the climate of N. England, and though some timid *piddling* souls shrink at the idea," a hundred times more "wish for a declaration of independence from the Crown."[6]

Adams was flattered by the attribution but declared himself innocent "as a babe." "'Poor harmless I!'" he wrote Tudor, "'And can I choose but smile/When every coxcomb knows me by my style.'" He could not have equaled the strength and brevity of the author's style, "nor his elegant simplicity, nor his piercing pathos," but in other respects he found it deficient. "The Old Testament reasoning against monarchy would have never come from me—The attempt to frame a continental constitution is feeble indeed—it is poor and despicable.—Yet this is a very meritorious production.—In point of argument there is nothing new.—I believe every one that is in it, had been hackneyed, in every conversation, public and private, before that pamphlet was written."[7]

As he observed the pamphlet's extraordinary influence he began to worry about its "whims," "sophisms" and "artful addresses to superstitious notions." It certainly had "a great deal of good sense delivered in clear, simple, concise, and nervous style," a style which he could only envy. "I could not have written anything in so manly and striking a style," he wrote Abigail. But he could certainly have offered a better system of government for the united colonies. "This writer," he observed, "seems to have very inadequate ideas of what is proper and necessary to be done in order to form constitutions for single colonies, as well as a great model of union for the whole." It was "the fate of men and things which do great good that they always do great evil too. 'Common Sense' by his crude, ignorant notion of a government by one assembly," he wrote Warren, "will do more mischief in dividing the friends of liberty, than all the Tory writings together. He is a keen writer but very ignorant of the science of government."[8]

One effect of *Common Sense* was to increase the clamor from Massachusetts for a declaration of independence. From all Adams' New England correspondents the word was the same: independence! Deacon Palmer ended his letter thanking Adams for *Common Sense* with the words, "This is *the time* for declaring independence; we never have had such a favorable moment before, and 'tis not likely we shall have such another if we neglect this."[9] Joseph Ward expressed similar sentiments;[10] Warren and William Tudor wrote to the same effect. The ordinary people of Massachusetts, Warren informed Adams, "can't account for the hesitancy they observe" in Congress. They wonder "why the dictates of common sense have not had the same influence upon the enlarged minds of their superiors that they feel on their own, and none can see safety or happiness in a future connection with B., void as they are of true policy, justice or humanity." "People are as they should be, the harvest is mature. I can't describe the sighing after independence; it is universal. Nothing remains of that prudence, moderation or timidity with which we have so long been plagued and embarrassed."[11] To Warren's statement that no "moderation or timidity" remained, John replied: "How is this possible? Is cunning at an end too—and reserve—and hinting against a measure that a man dare not oppose directly or disapprove openly? Is trimming at an end too? and duplicity? and hypocrisy? If they are, I give you joy, sir, of a group of tyrants gone. But I have not yet faith in all this. You deal in the marvelous like a traveler." Suddenly he was defending the reluctance of Congress. Had not the colonies, in effect, been independent? Were not the privateering and commercial laws a tacit assumption of independence? What more did the people of Massachusetts want? "Why don't Your Honors of the General Court, if you are so unanimous in this, give positive instructions to your own delegates to promote independency? Don't blame your delegates until they have disobeyed your instructions in favor of independency. The Southern colonies say you are afraid." Indeed word from the South is that they speak of nothing "but *Common Sense* and independency," and such is their vehemence in the cause that it will require "the coolness of the Northern colonies to restrain them from running to excess."[12]

Those hotheads who clamored for action regardless of the cost had no conception of the difficulty of political action and the dangers involved in overthrowing an established order, however imperfect it might be. The very reluctance of the states to take the step to independence might, if properly managed, make the new government far more stable and orderly than it would otherwise be. "Such mighty revolutions," he reminded Warren, "make a deep impression on the minds of men, and set many violent passions at work. Hope, fear, joy, sorrow, love, hatred, malice, envy, revenge, jealousy, ambition, avarice, resentment, gratitude, and every other passion, feeling, sentiment, principle, and imagination were never in more lively exercise than they are now from Florida to Canada inclusively. May God in His providence overrule the whole for the good of mankind," and Congress have the courage to ride out the whirlwind.

The management of "so complicated and mighty a machine as the United Colonies," he told his friend, "requires the meekness of Moses, the patience of Job and the wisdom of Solomon, added to the valor of David." Congress was moving slowly in the direction of independence, but "forced attempts to accelerate their motions would have been attended with discontent and perhaps convulsions." Where Warren had been exhorting Congress to act, Adams now advised his friend to try to persuade the Massachusetts General Court to set up a new government. Any time earlier it might have been "disagreeable and perhaps dangerous; but it is quite otherwise now." For his own part, impatient as he had at times been, Adams did "not at all wonder that so much reluctance has been shown to the measure of independency. All great changes are irksome to the human mind, especially those which are attended with great dangers and uncertain effects. No man living can foresee the consequences of such a measure and therefore I think it ought not to have been undertaken until the design of Providence by a series of great events had so plainly marked out the necessity of it that he who runs might read." Adams' master, the great Earl of Clarendon, had taught him the meaning of the scriptural phrase "in the fullness of time"; and Abigail was as aware of the need for "timing" as her husband. She quoted Shakespeare to him: "'There is a tide in the affairs of men,/ Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;/Omitted, all the voyage of their life/Is bound in shallows and in miseries./On such a full sea are we now afloat;/And we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures.'"[13]

If there was a key to the science of politics, that was it. Time brought human affairs to ripeness; to that point of equilibrium where action could be taken at the smallest, most carefully calculated cost, when the fulcrum of a few hardy spirits could shift the whole vast mass of history. To be too soon was as bad as to be too late, perhaps, indeed, even worse. Only those should make revolutions who cared, next to justice, for order. The careless, the hasty, the fanatical, the recklessly impatient—they brought destruction and ruin more often than happiness.

Those ardent revolutionaries who killed particular men because they loved Man in the abstract put a dark curse on the ideals they professed and compromised the causes for which they themselves were quite ready to die. "A mind as vast as the ocean or atmosphere is necessary to penetrate and comprehend all the intricate and complicated interests which compose the machine of the confederate colonies," he warned Warren. It required all of Adams' philosophy "and more than all at times to preserve that serenity of mind and steadiness of heart which is necessary to watch the motions of friends and enemies, of the violent and the timid, the credulous and the dull, as well as the wicked. But if I can contribute ever so little towards preserving the principles of virtue and freedom in the world my time and life will not be ill spent. A man must have a wider expansion of genius than has fallen to my share to see to the end of these great commotions. But on such a full sea are we now afloat that we must be content to trust to winds and currents with the best skill we have under a kind Providence to land us in a port of peace, liberty and safety."[14]

It was right and proper to yearn for free and popular governments but it was also necessary to keep in mind that there was "great danger that these governments will not make us happy. . . . I fear that, in every assembly, members will obtain an influence, by noise not sense, by meanness not greatness, by ignorance not learning, by contracted hearts not large souls." Adams feared also that it would be impossible "to convince and persuade people to establish wise regulations. . . . There must be a decency, and respect and veneration introduced for persons in authority, of every rank, or we are undone. In a popular government, this is the only way of supporting order, and in our circumstances, as our people have been so long without any government at all, it is more necessary than in any other." The May elections in Massachusetts should, in this view, be conducted with such great ceremony and solemnity as to "make an impression on the whole people."[15]

Another matter that troubled Adams was the "leveling spirit" which was abroad. General Sullivan had written that it so prevailed in Massachusetts, even among "the mighty," that he feared "we shall finally be obliged to call in a military force to do that which civil government was originally designed for." While a representative was certainly in a sense the servant of the people, "the idea that he who is set up by the whole people is greater than any individual [was] equally important," but now was cast aside as old-fashioned doctrine.[16] The new doctrine was distinguished by a strident insistence that one man was as good as another, the ignorant bumpkin with the experienced legislator, the uneducated apprentice with the trained lawyer or doctor.

To say that they had equal rights before the law and equal opportunities to advance in the world was one thing, but this querulous contention that breeding, education, experience, manners, character and property counted for nothing was troubling and dangerous. It was the same spirit which held up single-branch legislatures as the model of popular government where the will of the people was expressed directly, unencumbered by judges and executive officers. Indeed, the "leveling spirit" looked askance on law and lawyers. The will of the people was the magic phrase. The people, by this new doctrine, were naturally and inherently good. It thus followed that restraints and inhibitions on their actions were bad. If the people wished this presently and something else tomorrow, what right had law to gainsay them? This was, in Adams' view, a most insidious dogma. It was government by men, not by laws, government in which order and stability yielded to whim and fashion, in which the tyranny of the majority might at any moment topple the safeguards that protected the life, liberty and property of a minority of the community.

The revolutionary crisis drew forth the devoted and able and with them the emotionally unstable, the meanly ambitious, the zealots and the simple cranks. Most of the new men had no special loyalty to any older order of things; they had been shaped by no discipline of thought or action and therefore lived off the ephemera of the moment, sucking nourishment out of the latest intellectual fads that were abroad, sharp and devious, elbowing their betters aside. The complex and intricate issues of power, of government, of theology, of the nature of man and the cosmos, they reduced to simple-minded formulas that rolled off their tongues without effort and without thought.

It was not so much that the "new men" were less honest than the old. Most of them were honest enough. But many of them were simply rather opportunistic local politicians, skimpily educated and often lacking in a concept of duty. A good number of them were, like Ebenezer Thayer, shrewd and resourceful individuals who had accepted the leadership of abler men. Now, with many of these men drawn into the army, into Congress, or dropping out as neutrals in the struggle, the Thayers stepped forward to claim leadership themselves and their places were taken, in many instances, by men less qualified and experienced than they. Moreover the leveling spirit with its small-spirited refusal to respect excellence had, to Adams, disturbing implications. Every society in history had some form and order in the relations of its members to each other. In healthy states, a trained and responsible upper class, sensitive to popular needs and hospitable to the talented members of those strata which lay below it, set the standards and determined the character of those social orders that ranked lower in the scale. A proper subordination, a respect for authority, a recognition of merit—all these things were essential to a sound and healthy society, be it a monarchy, aristocracy or republic. These qualities had nothing to do with the democracy that was being spoken of by a few of the more daring as the proper form of government. By any reasonable standard, the Province of Massachusetts was the most democratic social group since man had risen above tribal life. It could be argued that the colony enjoyed a vast degree of democracy in its social arrangements simply because it accepted a considerable degree of order and discipline. John Adams was no friend to a rigidly ordered society of sharply defined classes, but he was dismayed to see the principle that able men, however humble their origins, had a right to develop their abilities to the utmost being twisted until it was made to assert, as a kind of law of nature, that everyone was equal to everyone else and all should be upon a level. He was even more disturbed to observe that this new dogma was being elaborated into a political credo that was the enemy of stable government, and therefore of the happiness of the governed.

At the same time, in a republic, the upper classes must not alienate the "generality" by a supercilious and arrogant manner. Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant had written that Jerseyites had a "miserable prejudice against men of education." The news grieved Adams. "There is a spice of this everywhere," he replied. "But liberty has no enemy more dangerous than such a prejudice. It is your business, my friend, as a statesman to soften and eradicate this prejudice," and the best way to do this is to caution "gentlemen of education" to suppress "some of their airs of scorn, vanity, and pride, in which . . . they sometimes indulge themselves. Gentlemen cannot expect the confidence of the common people if they treat them ill, or refuse haughtily to comply with some of their favorite notions."[17]

The news from Boston contained some troubling items. In addition to the leveling spirit that Warren had complained of, John Winthrop wrote of a "spirit of innovation" that was closely akin. "It seems," he noted anxiously, "as if everything was to be altered. Scarce a newspaper but teems with new projects." Popular agitation was especially strong for reforms of the courts that would bring advantages to debtors. Courts were not allowed to sit because the judges' commissions were still in the name of the Crown; complaints were general about legal fees being exorbitant; and there was a general disposition to question all law and authority. It was not the time to undertake so many alterations in the forms of government, Winthrop wrote; "'tis like repairing a house that is on fire."[18] There was in *Common Sense* much of this same leveling spirit which seemed to evoke such an enthusiastic popular response. It made John more than ever inclined to reflect on the problems of fashioning governments that would preserve order and justice.

Soon after his return to Congress, Adams was approached by William Hooper and John Penn, delegates from North Carolina, who were returning to that colony with the hope of stimulating it to draw up its own frame of government. Their friends had instructed them to bring along "every hint [they] could collect concerning government," and the two men had petitioned Adams, who had spoken so often to them of the proper principles of government, to put down his own thoughts. John found the suggestion irresistible. He "concluded to borrow a little time from his sleep," and made two copies of his observations, one for Hooper and one for Penn. George Wythe got a glimpse of Hooper's copy and asked Adams for a draft for himself, and then another for Jonathan Sergeant of New Jersey. When Richard Henry Lee requested still another copy, Adams, worn out with rewriting, borrowed George Wythe's and sent it off to Lee, who received permission to have it published in a "very incorrect, and not truly printed" edition; it would perhaps serve at least to "mark out a path, and put men upon thinking." Adams' *Thoughts on Government* were prefaced with the observation that since "the blessings of society depend entirely on . . . constitutions of government" which generally last for many generations, "there can be no employment more agreeable to a benevolent mind than a research after the best."

Some frivolous spirits had argued that the particular form of a government made no difference if the government was well administered, but this was manifestly absurd. "Nothing is more certain, from the history of nations and the nature of man, than that some forms of government are better fitted for being well administered than others," Adams declared.

The principal end of government, all competent political theorists agreed, was the happiness of the governed, and "all sober inquirers after truth, ancient and modern, pagan and Christian," had declared that happiness is to be found only in virtue. It thus followed, as logically as a Newtonian theorem—what he had written earlier to Mercy Warren—that government is best which most effectively stimulates virtue in its citizens. Every government must rest on some principle or passion in the minds of the people. Fear has been the foundation of most governments, honor of a few, but in fashioning new governments for the American states "the noblest principles and most generous affections in our nature" must be elicited to support "the noblest and most generous models of government." Again, it will be evident to anyone who has read the great political scientists—Locke, Milton, Sidney, Harrington, Nedham, Neville, Burnet and Hoadly—that "there is no good government but what is republican . . . because the very definition of a republic is 'an empire of laws, and not of men.'" That is to say, men are secured in their rights to life, liberty and property by clear and fair laws, falling equally on all, wisely and justly administered. Any society where rights are bestowed as privileges handed down at the whim of a king, or an aristocracy, or even of a popular assembly, is a society of men, not of laws, and a society that will tend inevitably to despotism and repression.

But among republics there was an infinite variety and, again, it was necessary to choose the best. A republic must have a representative assembly chosen by the owners of real property or by electors otherwise qualified. The assembly should, as far as possible, "be in miniature an exact portrait of the people at large. It should think, feel, reason, and act like them. . . . Equal interests among the people should have equal interests in it." But there must be more, on the legislative side, than one assembly. "A people cannot be long free nor ever happy whose government is in one assembly," for a "single assembly is liable to all the vices, follies, and frailties of an individual; subject to fits of humor, starts of passion, flights of enthusiasm, partialities, or prejudice, and consequently productive of hasty results and absurd judgments." Moreover a single assembly will lust after power and, after a time, "not hesitate to vote itself perpetual." History again, especially that of Rome, demonstrated the truth of this maxim, as did the action of the Long Parliament in England during the Civil War and that of the Estates-General of Holland—at first elective, then for life, and finally, self-perpetuating.

A single representative assembly is unable to exercise the executive power, "for want of two essential properties, secrecy and dispatch." Even less can it act as a judicial body; "it is too numerous, too slow, and too little skilled in the laws." At this point Adams developed more fully the ideas he had put forth in his earlier letter to Richard Henry Lee. The legislative branch should consist of two branches, the second or council chosen from the first, and the two, in turn, electing by joint ballot a governor; judges, governor and assembly each to have, in effect, a veto upon the actions of the others. All elections should be annual, for "where annual elections end, there slavery begins," and self-important politicians would by this means be taught "the great political virtues of humility, patience, and moderation, without which every man in power becomes a ravenous beast of prey." The patently impractical provision for yearly elections of the higher offices of state Adams was willing to relax if the convenience, freedom or happiness of society was thereby better served.

Judges might be impeached by the House of Representatives before the Governor and Council. A militia law should require all, "or with very few exceptions besides cases of conscience," to be provided with arms and trained in military exercises. "Laws for the liberal education of youth, especially of the lower class of people, are so extremely wise and useful," Adams added, "that, to a humane and generous mind, no expense for this purpose would be thought extravagant.

"A constitution founded on these principles," Adams wrote his friend, "introduces knowledge among the people, inspires them with a conscious dignity becoming [to] freemen; a general emulation takes place which causes good humor, sociability, good manners, and good morals to be general." Such a government, animated by high ideals of freedom and the general good, "makes the common people brave and enterprising." The opportunity to advance themselves in the world makes them "sober, industrious and frugal," concerned a little with pleasure, but a great deal more with business.

The individual colonies must, of course, be left to devise governments of their own choice, and if a Continental constitution should be formed to define the authority and the functions of Congress, it should be simply a representative body such as the present one, confined to "war, trade, disputes between colony and colony, the post office" and the distribution of unsettled lands.

"You and I, my dear friend," he wrote at the end of his dissertation, "have been sent into life at a time when the greatest lawmakers of antiquity would have wished to live. How few of the human race have ever enjoyed an opportunity of making an election of government, more than of air, soil or climate, for themselves or their children! When, before the present epocha, had three millions of people full power and a fair opportunity to form and establish the wisest and happiest government that human wisdom can contribe?" Such was the responsibility which faced the leaders of the American colonies in the revolutionary crisis.[19]

The sight of his *Thoughts on Government* in print aroused mixed emotions in Adams. "In New England," he wrote, "[they] will be disdained because they are not popular enough; in the Southern colonies, they will be despised and insulted because too popular." He would get nothing by it, "because I never get anything by anything that I do," he confided to Abigail. "I am sure the public or posterity ought to get something." His children especially, he hoped, would live to reap some benefit from it. Not the benefit of riches or luxury, but the greater heritage of "a free constitution of government. . . . They shall live upon thin diets, wear mean clothes, and work hard with cheerful hearts and free spirits, or they may be the children of the earth, or of no one, for me."

Adams sent his *Thoughts* to various friends and solicited their comments. One of the recipients was Patrick Henry, who was then at work framing a constitution for Virginia. Henry replied with warm praise. "I am not without hopes it may produce good here," he wrote, "where there is among most of our opulent families a strong bias to aristocracy. I tell my friends you are the author. Upon that supposition I have two reasons for liking the book. The sentiments are precisely the same I have long since taken up, and they come recommended by you. Go on, my dear friend, to assail the strongholds of tyranny." A possible French alliance, Henry confessed, "with me is everything"; to lose it would produce "dreadful" consequences. The formation of a confederacy must precede "an open declaration of independency and foreign alliance." The republican form of government that Henry's hopes were set on had many enemies, among them Carter Braxton, who had undertaken to reply to Adams' *Thoughts.* Braxton's work was "weak, shallow, evasive and the whole performance an affront and disgrace to his native state. Would to God you and Mr. Sam Adams were here," Henry added. "It shall be my incessant study so to form the portrait of government that a kindred with New England may be discerned in it. And if all of your excellencies cannot be preserved, yet I hope to retain as much of the likeness that posterity shall pronounce us descended from the same stock. I shall think perfection is obtained if we have your approbation."[20]

Adams was delighted to hear that Virginia was well launched on the important project of framing a government and he knew of "none so competent to the task as the author of the first Virginia resolutions against the Stamp Act. . . . Happy Virginia, whose constitution is framed by so masterly a builder!" Not to be outdone in compliments, Adams proclaimed: "We all look up to Virginia for examples." Henry and Adams, champions of republican government and enemies of aristocracy, must concert against "the dons, the bashaws, the grandees, the patricians, the sachems, the nabobs, call them by what names you will." These fine gentlemen may "sigh and groan, and fret, and sometimes stamp and foam and curse, but all in vain." It is the will of the great body of the people and of their leaders "that a more equal liberty than has prevailed in other parts of the earth must be established in America."

The "insolent domination" of "a few, a very few, opulent, monopolizing families," he assured his Virginia friend, "will be brought down nearer to the confines of reason and moderation. . . . It will do them good in this world, and in every other."[21]

Throughout the winter and spring of 1776, Congress occupied itself with four principal issues: the question of American trade, or, more specifically, whether to throw open the ports to European vessels without restriction; the creation of a navy and the issuing of letters of marque and reprisal which would unleash privateers; the issue of independence; and finally the rumor, based on a letter from Lord Dunmore to Washington, of the imminent arrival of British commissioners to effect a reconciliation. It was perhaps this last which overshadowed all the deliberations of Congress and inhibited its actions—this final hope, this "airy phantom," as Adams called it. The rumor "gained credit like a charm," he wrote Abigail, "not only with, but against the clearest evidence. . . . Credulity and the want of foresight are imperfections in the human character, that no politician can sufficiently guard against." To Adams the commissioners were "a messiah that will never come. This story of commissioners is as arrant an illusion as ever was hatched in the brain of an enthusiast, a politician or a maniac. I have laughed at it, scolded at it, grieved at it, and I don't know but I may have rip'd at it. But it is vain to reason against such delusions."[22]

The problem of trade took up the time of the delegates from shortly after the convening of Congress until April. There had been many mutterings and complaints from merchants against the restrictions that had been imposed on colonial commerce. James Wilson disputed with Roger Sherman. Wilson was in favor of opening the ports and leaving it to the merchants "to judge for themselves of the danger and risk," while Sherman feared that American vessels captured by the British would help to supply the enemy. George Wythe wanted the ports opened to all nations that would trade with the colonies; merchant vessels should be authorized to arm themselves and carry letters of marque and reprisal, and foreign powers should be invited to make treaties of commerce with Congress. But that of course brought up another point once more: in what character should the agents of Congress attempt to make such treaties—"as subjects of Great Britain—as rebels?" "Why," Wythe asked with evident irritation, "should we be so fond of calling ourselves dutiful subjects?" As long as the Americans insisted on so styling themselves their trade must lie between the devil and the deep. "We must declare ourselves a free people," he exclaimed. But there was no reverberation from the delegates. They sat with set faces, or looked away from the diminutive orator's indignant glance. Still he persisted and succeeded in having the letters of the Secret Committee of Correspondence laid before Congress and a committee appointed "to prepare a draft of a firm confederation, to be reported as soon as may be to this Congress, to be considered and digested and recommended to the several assemblies and conventions of these United Colonies, to be by them adopted, ratified and confirmed."

In the debate on trade the attention of the delegates turned to France and Spain. What would the reaction of France be to an effort by the Americans to assert their independence? Would France remain neutral or would she support the colonies? Adams addressed himself to the questions—first, what assistance might be obtained from France? and second, what connection should America form with that nation in the event that she espoused the colonial cause? His answer was that Congress should accept no political connection and submit, in no degree, to French authority. No French troops should set foot on American soil; there should be only commercial ties—"that is . . . a treaty to receive her ships into our ports," while the French ports in turn would be open to ships from the colonies; France to "furnish us with arms, cannon, saltpeter, powder, duck, steel."[23]

Week after week the tedious debates dragged on. As Adams put it, "Indians' affairs, revenue matters, naval arrangements and twenty other things, many of them very trivial, were mixed in those committees of the whole, with the great subjects of government, independence and commerce. Little things were designedly thrown in the way of great ones, and the time consumed on trifles which ought to have been consecrated to higher interests." Adams and his allies "could only harangue against the misapplication of time, and harangues consumed more time, so that we could only now and then snatch a transient glance at the promised land"—independence.

Finally, in late March, reluctantly and hesitantly, Congress authorized the fitting out of armed vessels "to cruise on the enemies of these United Colonies." Two related resolves provided for adjudication of prizes and the fortifying of ports into which captured prizes could be carried. Adams noted in his diary the achievement of one of the principal objectives for which he had fought so long. "I have vanity enough," he wrote Abigail, "to take to myself a share in the merit of the American navy. It was always a measure that my heart was much engaged in, and I pursued it for a long time against the wind and tide, but at last obtained it."[24]

On April 3 he noted in the diary: "Great things were done. The naval system made great progress," and on the next day, he added, "We did great things again." This time it was commissions and instructions to privateers, and letters of marque and reprisal. Two days later Congress "opened the ports and set our commerce at liberty." It was in effect the passing of the Rubicon. But, John cautioned Abigail, "this is not independency." Independence meant a new government in every colony, a common constitution for the confederation, and treaties with foreign nations. "When these things will be done, or any of them," he added, "time must discover. Perhaps the time is near, perhaps a great way off."[25]

He wrote in a similar vein to General Horatio Gates that "in politics the middle way is none at all. If we finally fail in this great and glorious contest, it will be by bewildering ourselves in groping after the middle way. We have hitherto conducted half a war . . . but you will see by tomorrow's paper that for the future we are likely to wage three quarters of a war." But for many of the delegates "independency is an hobgoblin, of so frightful mien, that it would throw a delicate person into fits to look it in the face."

In Braintree, Abigail worried over the absence of news from her husband although she was entertained by the report that he and John Hancock had boarded a British man-of-war at New York and sailed for England to sell their services to the ministry. Some of "the gaping vulgar" of the town had swallowed the story at one gulp and, in consequence, there had been a lively brawl at Captain Thayer's public house where an unhappy wretch who repeated the tale had been dragged out by the scruff of his neck and threatened with an unmerciful thrashing for spreading such scandalous lies. Dr. Tufts had offered his life as a guarantee of Adams' loyalty and the furor had soon died down.

There were better than rumors of a long-planned attack by Washington's army on the British in Boston which kept Abigail "in a continual state of anxiety and expectation. . . . It has been said 'tomorrow' and 'tomorrow' for this month," she wrote John, "but when the dreadful tomorrow will be, I know not." Even as she sat at her desk the house began to shake with the thunder of distant cannon fire. She went to bed at midnight but the cannon continued firing and her heart "beat pace with them" through the early morning hours. Next day the militia were mustered on the North Common with three days' rations; the boys and men of Braintree, nervous and self-conscious, marched off to Boston with their fellow militiamen from Weymouth, Hingham and Milton. Abigail climbed Penn's Hill and, seated on its granite crest, watched the spectacular display of cannon fire between the British and American batteries, listening to the "amazing roar." The sound, she wrote, "is one of the grandest in nature, and is of the true species of the sublime! 'Tis now an incessant roar; but oh! the fatal ideas which are connected with the sound! How many of our dear countrymen must fall!"

That night the firing continued; Abigail, having gone to bed at twelve, rose an hour later and paced about the dark house. The windows rattled and the house shook with the concussion of twenty-four-pounders. At six in the morning the firing ceased and there was a blessed quiet. Word came that the Continental forces had occupied Dorchester overlooking Boston Hill with the loss of only one man. The first phase of the assault on Boston had been successfully completed; four thousand men dug in on the hill, mounted artillery and prepared to pound the British unmercifully. Abigail's mind was full of lurid pictures of the mutilated city. "I sometimes think I cannot stand it," she wrote to John. "I wish myself with you, out of hearing as I cannot assist them. . . . I am too much agitated to write as I ought, and languid for want of rest." The boys showed a male and juvenile pleasure in the uproar. It was a kind of symphony of noise; it suggested a prolonged holiday like the fireworks that usually celebrated King George's birthday.

Thursday, March 7, almost a week after the first heavy cannonading had started, the militia came marching back, tired and dirty and heroic, full of the incommunicable wonder of battle, although actually they had done far more digging than fighting. Abigail was frankly disappointed. So much clamor, so much splendid display, so much "muster and stir," and all that had been accomplished was the seizure of Dorchester Hill. "I would not have suffered all I have for two such hills," she wrote indignantly. What Abigail did not understand was that the hill whose acquisition she scorned, once rimmed with cannon, must make the city untenable for the British. General Howe, when he saw the Americans in possession, had exclaimed, "My God! These fellows have done more work in one night than I could make my army do in three months." Three hundred and seventy teams of horses and four thousand men had labored through the night to erect a formidable system of forts and breastworks. Indeed, Abigail had scarcely finished her complaint when the cannon, newly emplaced on Dorchester Heights, opened fire with a roar. Shakespeare's martial phrases were again in her mind, where "domestic fury and fierce civil strife" raged and the thoughts of her bleeding city so unnerved her that she was unable to write further. "The refuge of the believer, amidst all the afflictive dispensations of Providence, is that the Lord reigneth, and that He can restrain the arm of man."[26]

A week later Abigail wrote that some seventy or eighty British ships were anchored in the harbor and offshore as far south as Weymouth. They appeared to be loading, and deserters from the city reported that the troops were plundering the city, carrying off all that was portable, and burning, breaking or heaving into the harbor what they could not remove. For days wreckage washed ashore—"lids of desks, mahogany chairs, tables, etc." Orders again went to the militia to be prepared to march at a moment's warning. Subsequently the cannon spoke up, this time as the Continentals took Nook's Hill and hastened the British withdrawal. By sunrise the next day, March 17, the city was empty of British forces; from her perch on Penn's Hill Abigail looked down on the largest fleet ever seen in American waters—"upwards of a hundred and seventy sail," crowding the harbor and the roads, their masts like a water-borne forest. Boston's long travail was over; its narrow, winding streets, littered with the debris of war, were soon crowded with curious sight-seers from the besieging army and civilians from nearby towns who examined the scars left by the British occupation and by Continental cannon balls.

With the British gone, Abigail was full of impatience to hear news from Philadelphia. Their house in Boston had been occupied by a regimental doctor; though it was very dirty and had been stripped of its few furnishings it was otherwise undamaged. John Hancock's handsome mansion had emerged unscathed and the town in general "left in a better state than we expected." Some Tories, fleeing with the British, had left behind rent for the owners of the houses they had lived in during the siege.

In Congress, Adams had ample evidence of the hostility of the more conservative members toward him. His enemies spread the story that the reason he was for independence was that he wished to assume his office as Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Superior Court, which he could do only if Massachusetts declared itself independent of Great Britain. The Maryland legislature, dominated by Tories, seeing an opportunity to spike John's guns, instructed its delegates "to endeavor to obtain a resolve of Congress that no person who holds . . . or enjoys any office of profit under the Continental Congress, or under any government assumed since the present controversy with Great Britain began, or which shall hereafter be assumed . . . shall, during the time of his holding or receiving the same, be eligible to sit in Congress." When the motion was presented Adams was sure that it was directed at him. He knew how to reply; he rose from his seat "with great coolness and deliberation" and, suppressing with partial success a triumphant grin, offered to second the motion on condition that its mover would accept an amendment of Adams' that no man who held office under any past or present government be allowed to sit as a delegate in Congress. The member who had presented the motion held high office under the proprietary government of his native colony and Adams' allies laughed delightedly at his counterthrust. Stimulated by such appreciation, Adams went further and offered a self-denying ordinance that every member of Congress, before the matter of independence was considered, should sign a solemn oath never to hold any office of any kind in America after the war with Great Britain was over. George Wythe jumped up at once to point out that the delegates had no right to exclude any members from voting on such issues and they could not possibly undertake to refrain from holding offices after the conflict or before.

Be that as it might, Adams answered, he only meant to indicate that he would freely consent to any such arrangement. The motion of the gentleman from Maryland had been intended as a personal attack upon him and he was determined to demonstrate that he possessed as much disinterestedness as any delegate in Congress. He thus reviewed the circumstances of his appointment to the office of Chief Justice and vindicated his own rectitude, while Charles Thomson, no friend to the officious Marylander, chuckled and laughed at Adams' sallies.[27]

Word of the evacuation of Boston by the British was a spur to Congress, but that body was still haunted by the commissioners. Someone raised the question of how these commissioners, whose arrival was daily expected, were to receive their passports. If they applied to Congress, it would be a *de facto* admission of the authority of that body; if they did not, should they even be allowed to land? The issue, Adams felt, was skillfully exploited by Benjamin Harrison, whom he characterized bitterly as "an indolent, luxurious, heavy gentlemen . . . of no use in Congress or committee, but a great embarrassment to both." Virginia must be discreetly joggled. Harrison was a kind of stout keystone with a position and respectability that Richard Henry Lee could not rival. So Harrison placed himself across the path and Hancock, as President of Congress, allied himself alongside Harrison and John Dickinson, to the irritation of John and the rage of Samuel Adams. Even the terms in which the commissioners were to be referred to occasioned a hot debate. The moderates wanted to title them "the commissioners for effecting a reconciliation," while Adams and his adherents insisted on calling them "commissioners . . . to treat of peace." Harrison wished to authorize Washington to receive the envoys with ceremony, but here again the Adams forces blocked the motion. The commissioners, when and if they arrived, should be sent on to Congress for their passports and for the conduct of the negotiations. "Upon the whole," Adams wrote later, "we avoided the snare and brought the controversy to a close with some dignity. But it will never be known how much labor it cost us to accomplish it."[28]

This left the issue of independence. The Pennsylvania and New York delegates, at every effort to steer Congress toward a declaration of independence, had protested that they were bound by the instructions of their respective assemblies to resist any move to separate the colonies from the Mother Country. In March Adams drew up a resolution aimed at the "deadly instructions" of the Pennsylvania Assembly. The resolution recommended to those colonies "who have limited the powers of their delegates in this Congress, by any express instructions, that they repeal or suspend those instructions for a certain time," in order that Congress might have the power, "without any unnecessary obstruction or embarrassment, to concern, direct and order such further measures as may seem to them necessary for the defense and preservation, support and establishment of right and liberty in these colonies." This maneuver, if successful, would strip the Quaker leaders "of all that unjust and unequal power" which they had for so long maintained. "The Tories here," John wrote James Warren, "attribute this maneuver to your friends [the two Adamses]. . . . If the charge is true, the posterity of Pennsylvania will have cause to bless your friends from generation to generation."[29]

But the resolution failed and the Pennsylvania delegates continued to refer to their instructions as the basis for their opposition to independence. The moderate Whigs in the Province were anxious to prevent a complete overthrow of the Assembly by which power would pass to the most radical elements. They thus stalled, hoping that the Assembly, enlarged by a motion of John Dickinson's to include seventeen more members from the underrepresented western counties, would modify the instructions to its delegates in Congress. However, the augmented Assembly still remained securely in the hands of opponents of independence and the two Adamses and Richard Henry Lee began to devise a means of bringing Pennsylvania into line.

On May 10, Lee proposed that "it be recommended to the respective assemblies and conventions of the United Colonies, where no government sufficient to the exigencies of their affairs hath been hitherto established, to adopt such government as shall, in the opinion of the representatives of the people, best conduce to the happiness and safety of their constituents in particular, and America in general." Adams at once seconded the motion, and, inoffensive enough, it was shepherded through Congress. Then came the second or concealed portion of the Lee-Adams maneuver. A committee was appointed to prepare a preamble to the resolution and, as it happened, Adams, Lee and John Rutledge were appointed to the committee. On the fifteenth of May the preamble, written by Adams, was presented to Congress. It was notably stronger than the resolve itself, stating without equivocation that, since the King had in effect excluded "the inhabitants of the United Colonies from the protection of his Crown" and waged a ruthless war upon them, it was necessary that "the exercise of every kind of authority under the said Crown should be totally suppressed, and all the powers of government exerted under the authority of the people of the colonies."

As soon as Adams had presented the preamble, James Duane, the reluctant New Yorker, was on his feet to oppose the resolution and preamble alike. "I do protest against this piece of mechanism, this preamble, for the fabrication of independence," he declared. His instructions from the New York legislature disbarred him from accepting such a motion. Every packet from Europe brought word that commissioners were on their way from England to effect a reconciliation. "Congress ought not to determine a point of this sort about instituting governments.

What is it to Congress," he asked, "how justice is administered? You have no right to pass the resolution any more than Parliament has. . . . Why all this haste? Why all this urging? Why this driving? I shall take the liberty of informing my constituents that I have not been guilty of a breach of trust." Having said this much, he concluded bitterly by conceding that his opposition was futile. The Lee-Adams faction had undoubtedly lined up sufficient votes in advance to pass the preamble. Adams answered Duane with a confident smile. The preamble was more than a machine for manufacturing independence, it was the fact of independence; but, he added, "we must have it with more formality, yet." Thomas McKean supported Adams: "I . . . think," he said, "we shall lose our liberties, properties, and lives too, if we do not take this step." Samuel Adams backed up McKean. Duane's real argument was not against the preamble but simply that he had not the authority, under his instructions, to vote for it. It was, Sam reminded the delegates, the King who had cast out the colonies, not the colonies who had rejected the King.

James Wilson, the florid, nearsighted young Scotsman from Pennsylvania, undertook to refute the Massachusetts delegate or, perhaps better, to make clear the basis of his own resistance. It was a well-established maxim that "all government originates from the people. We are the servants of the people, sent here to act under a delegated authority. If we exceed it, voluntarily, we deserve neither excuse or justification. Some have been put under restraint by their constituents; they cannot vote without transgressing this line." He, like Duane, was under binding instructions from the Assembly of his Province, which had "done much and asked little from this Congress." The augmented Assembly would meet in a few days. Was it asking too much to ask for a postponement of the preamble's publication until that time in the hope that the instructions to the Pennsylvania delegates would be changed? "In this Province," he declared dramatically, "if that preamble passes, there will be an immediate dissolution of every kind of authority; the people will be instantly in a state of nature. Why then precipitate this measure? Before we are prepared to build the new house, why should we pull down the old one?"

To Richard Henry Lee, Wilson's arguments applied more to the resolve itself than to the preamble, and the resolve had already been passed by Congress. The roll was called; under the watchful eyes of Lee and the Adamses, the majority, as Duane had predicted, voted "that the said preamble, with the resolution published the 10th instant, be published."

To Adams, then and later, the resolution was "an epocha, a decisive event." It was the culmination of a campaign which he and his cousin, in alliance with Richard Henry Lee, had waged for over a year, a campaign full of inconclusive skirmishes and defeats, but a campaign in which the leaders had seldom slackened their efforts; in the course of it every wile and stratagem consistent with honesty had been employed by men who had learned political tactics in two very different but perhaps equally demanding schools—the Virginia county and the New England town meeting. Political action was very seldom, in the eighteenth century, as in the twentieth, a spontaneous response, guided by rational and realistic motives, to the requirements or urgencies of the moment. It was then, as now, woven of a web of conflicting interests and aspirations, of sharply opposed ideas and personalities. To produce action required, of course, vision and foresight, but above all astute and experienced management—a mastery, to put it simply, of the involved and complicated machinery of politics where complex human motivations and the particular dilemmas confronting them made up the warp and woof of the tapestry of history.

As soon as the vote on the preamble had passed, Richard Henry Lee hurried off to Williamsburg where the Virginia convention was sitting, intending to push that body into declaring for independence and instructing its delegates to press for a similar declaration in Congress. He wrote triumphantly to Adams that the resolve had been greeted with general rejoicing. "The British flag on the capitol was immediately struck, and the Continental [flag of Congress] foisted in its room. The troops were drawn out, and we had a discharge of artillery and small arms."[30]

Adams for his part wrote to Abigail that England had finally driven America to the last step—a complete separation from her, a total, absolute independence, not only of her Parliament, but of her Crown; such was the effect of the resolve and preamble. A confederation among the colonies or foreign alliance was not necessary to establish a "perfect separation" from Britain. That, Adams argued, "is effected by extinguishing all authority under the Crown, Parliament, and nation, as the resolution for instituting governments has done, to all intents and purposes." Adams was convinced that no colony which assumed its own government would ever give it up. "There is," he wrote Abigail, "something very unnatural and odious in a government a thousand leagues off. A whole government of our own choice, managed by persons whom we love, revere and can confide in, has charms in it for which men will fight."

Of his own role, he wrote: "Is it not a saying of Moses, 'Who am I, that I should go in and out before this great people?' When I consider the great events which are passed, and those greater which are rapidly advancing, and that I may have been instrumental in touching some springs and turning some small wheels which have had and will have such effects, I feel an awe upon my mind which is not easily described." Two young men, visitors from Charleston, South Carolina, had recounted for Adams the celebration in that city over the framing of a new constitution for the colony. The citizens of Charleston, they told Adams, watched "with transports and tears of joy" while their new Governor and Assembly walked out in procession. There was a "rapture" in the sight which transformed Englishmen into Americans beyond recapture or recall. As Adams rightly understood, this was a sentiment to which the people in general were more susceptible than most of their leaders. To be no longer Englishmen but Americans, to stand up before the world, free and independent, in control of their own affairs and their own destiny, seemed suddenly an intoxicating prospect. Adams was right in his assessment of the dangers of indecision and vacillation in Congress. The delegates to Congress were men whose orientation was toward the Mother Country; as members of the colonial elite they were so strongly drawn, so dependent, so conscious of the power and the majesty of England and of colonial subordination that independence was a fact that they could bring themselves to face only with the greatest reluctance. England was the sun toward whose magnificent rays they turned as instinctively as flowers.[31]

The case was different with the vast majority of colonists, much less self-conscious in their Englishness, some of them not English at all but Dutch and German and Irish and Scottish and French. They had not rushed toward a conflict with the Mother Country in most instances, but rather had followed along behind their leaders in the contention over abstract rights and general freedoms. However, once the current of events began to run strongly toward separation from Great Britain, these same colonists, without deep emotional and intellectual ties to the Mother Country, were swept along by a kind of inertia or, if one prefers, a momentum, and so rushed past their leaders who, in addition to being bound to England, were far more aware than their constituents of the dangerous shoals and storms of independence.

James Sullivan, a member of the Massachusetts General Court, wrote to Adams in May to solicit his advice about a new government for that colony. Sullivan suggested that any constitution should include reform of the franchise and this was a bait that Adams, busy and harassed as he was, could not resist taking. While he could not, as Sullivan had suggested, make a survey of the literature in the field, he would give him the benefit of his own hasty reflections. "It is certain, in theory," he wrote, "that the only moral foundation of government is the consent of the people." But the question remained, What people? and this was a problem of no little complexity. "To what an extent shall we carry this principle?" he asked. "Shall we say that every individual of the community, old and young, male and female, as well as rich and poor, must consent, expressly, to every act of legislation?" This is manifestly impossible. From whence, then, arises the right of the majority to bind the minority? The fact is that, as Harrington had demonstrated, "power always follows property. Men in general, in every society, who are wholly destitute of property, are also too little acquainted with public affairs to form a right judgment, and too dependent upon other men to have a will of their own. . . . Such is the frailty of the human heart, that very few men who have no property have any judgment of their own. They talk and vote as they are directed by some man of property, who has attached their minds to his interest." They were not, therefore, "independent men"—that magic status on which true republics must rest, men who owned property and thus could call their souls their own.

The matter was simply enough stated. It rested on a political principle as infallible as that of action and reaction in physics. It followed that the only way to preserve "a balance of power on the side of equal liberty and public virtue is to make the acquisition of land easy to every member of society; to make a division of land into small quantities, so that the multitude may be possessed of landed estates. If the multitude is possessed of the balance of real estate, the multitude will have the balance of power, and in that case the multitude will take care of the liberty, virtue, and interest of the multitude in all acts of government."

These principles had been instinctively followed in Massachusetts Bay from the first establishment of the colony—a wide and relatively equal distribution of landed property, with real estate available to virtually every man of even moderate industry and ambition. Moreover the people of the colony had never been "very rigid in scrutinizing into the qualifications of voters"; any man of unexceptional character was free to cast his ballot unchallenged even if he did not clearly possess the minimum property qualification of a forty-shilling freehold.

This was as it should be. There should be as little tampering as possible with a system which over many years had given general satisfaction and provided little ground for complaint. As for Sullivan's suggestion that the number of votes a citizen might be allowed to cast should be proportionate to the property he held, this was "utterly impracticable." It was a proposal characteristic of theorists and Utopian planners who had little experience with the problems of practical politics. He had a final word of warning for Sullivan. Let the legislators of Massachusetts leave the franchise entirely alone. If it was once altered "new claims will arise; women will demand a vote; lads from twelve to twenty-one will think their rights not closely enough attended to; and every man who has not a farthing will demand an equal voice with any other, in all acts of state." The result would be "to confound and destroy all distinctions, and prostrate all ranks to one common level."[32]

It has perhaps been worth recapitulating Adams' views on suffrage in some detail, because they were the views held by a vast majority of the patriot leaders. Political scientists have subsequently labeled them "the stake-in-society theory"—that is, that only those should vote who had a stake (property) in society and who could thus be trusted to behave in a responsible way. Roman history offered a sobering example of a nation in which the propertyless had enjoyed the franchise. Under the Gracchi the propertyless Roman mobs had been given the vote and had then proceeded to pass "agrarian laws"—laws that took property from those who possessed it legitimately and redistributed it among those without property. Agrarian laws, in consequence, were a nightmare to revolutionary statesmen, who knew the history of Rome as well, if not better, than that of Britain. The solution, as Adams had suggested, was the widest possible distribution of property, giving the humblest citizen material stake in his society and thus nipping any impulse to treat lightly the property of his more prosperous neighbor; for by doing so he would imperil his own. Those who subscribed to the stake-in-society theory viewed men as inherently sinful and corruptible, motivated in a large part by self-interest and only fitfully by more generous considerations. The counterdoctrines of the social levelers, doctrines which Adams and his colleagues so deplored, swept away the Harringtonian formula. All men, and perhaps someday even all women, argued these political philosophers, should have the vote, unrestricted, because, since men were inherently good, restraints were inexpedient and unnecessary, imposed on the many for the benefit of the few.

Adams and his fellow Whigs were acutely conscious of the precariousness of the venture on which they had embarked. It was, in all the perilous and uncharted sea of history, a wholly new enterprise, with the barest minimum of navigational aids. The charts which had been drafted by earlier mariners were quite inadequate. Here were thirteen separate and distinct states that must have governments of their own, and governments which would steer a path between the shoals of reaction and aristocracy on one side and the rocks of excessive democracy on the other. Throughout history governments had generally grown by an accretion of customs, practices and institutions, each shaped and tested by time, each responsive, at best, to some particular and often unique need. Nurtured in the English common law, Adams had a profound respect for this ordered and organic growth. If the American leaders were committed to change, they also believed profoundly in continuity. One trifled at his peril with social and political arrangements that had been ratified by time and usage.

XIX

THE STRAIN of the delay over declaring independence began to tell on Adams. He grew increasingly edgy and impatient. "When a few mighty matters are accomplished here," he wrote William Tudor, "I retreat, like Cincinnatus, to my plow and, like Sir William Temple, to my garden, and farewell politics. I am wearied to death; some of your younger folk must take your trick, and let me go to sleep."[1] His health, always feeble, might break down completely at any moment. Indeed, at the pace he was going—he spoke feelingly of "this incessant round of thinking and speaking upon the greatest subjects that ever employed the mind of man, and the most perplexing difficulties that ever puzzled it"[2]—he might well drop in his tracks.

He was involved in "drudgery of the most wasting, exhausting, consuming kind that I ever went through in my whole life. Objects of the most stupendous magnitude, measures in which the lives and liberties of millions, born and unborn, are most essentially interested," took up every hour of his day and many of the night. "We are," he wrote, "in the very midst of a revolution, the most complete, unexpected and remarkable of any in the history of nations. Every colony must be induced to institute a perfect government. All the colonies must be confederated together, in some solemn compact. The colonies must be declared free and independent states. . . . When these things shall be once well finished, or in a way of being so, I shall think that I have answered the end of my creation, and sing with pleasure my *Nunc Dimittis*, or if it should be the will of Heaven that I should live a little longer, return to my farm and family, ride circuits, plead law, or judge causes, just as you please."[3] And he assured Francis Dana that great things were under way: "Be silent and patient, and time will bring forth, after the usual groans, throes and pains upon such occasions, a fine child, a fine, vigorous, healthy boy, I presume. God bless him and make him a great, wise, virtuous, pious, rich and powerful man!"[4]

At the same time he was obsessed by gloomier reflections: "I have a very tender, feeling heart," he wrote Abigail, adding, "this country knows not, and never can know, the torments I have endured for its sake." He had, he confessed, seen little of the pure flame of patriotism. Men's motives were generally mixed. To acquire great popularity meant some conniving at the small arts of ingratiation; it meant, almost invariably, grasping for oneself, "under specious pretenses for the public good," and taking pains to form a phalanx of supporters to trumpet one's fame. James Warren, Christopher Gadsden and Samuel Ward were the three men in whom he had seen "the most generous disdain of every spice and species of such meanness." Warren, especially, had "both talents and virtues beyond most men in this world" but he had gained little recognition for his abilities. "Thus it always is and has been and will be," he added. He had been accused of "private views" and ambition since he had been appointed to the office of Chief Justice and he would be the object of such attacks as long as he held the office. "Let me have my farm, family and goose quill, and all the honors and offices this world has to bestow may go to those who deserve them better and desire them more. I court them not. . . . I had rather build stone wall upon Penn's Hill, than to be the first Prince in Europe, or the first General or first Senator in America."[5] Yet despite the protestations which he never ceased to make, Adams was as ambitious as he was sensitive. Why must he maintain with himself the elaborate and often wearisome pretense that he preferred the rural quiet of Braintree to the bustle and clamor and corruption of the great world beyond? He was, to be sure, for a man who so obviously relished the hard complexities of politics, genuinely torn in that he was attached to his native town with some of the strongest bonds that bind men in this world. Yet whenever a clear choice was offered between a retreat to Braintree and a difficult, arduous and honorable post, Adams, after a kind of ritualistic observance of his affection for Braintree and his desire to retire there, chose the demanding task. He was so clearly conscious of living under the eye of history that it is hard to feel that he was entirely candid in his stated reluctance to serve. At the same time, it would have been against his avowed code for him to turn down appeals to serve in this or that important capacity —judge, delegate, representative, minister or negotiator. One was to serve, but not to enjoy the service, and Adams did enjoy serving. To enjoy politics, of course, made the service a little less pure, tainted it, indeed, with self-interest and self-gratification. The eighteenth century's concept of disinterestedness was deeply colored by Protestant orthodoxy. Adams' obsession with his own motives was characteristic of the culture we call Puritanism. The Purtian in John Adams was at war with the joyful hedonist; it was a lifelong struggle in which the hedonist had as ally Adams' passionate involvement in life, and the Puritan a conscience hammered out by four generations of forebears who had carried on an unending dialogue with God. He, like his fathers before him, must be justified, and to be justified in this world is to invite the dangerous vice of pride. Adams, almost cruelly introspective, highly articulate, ceaselessly inquiring, was tormented by the opposition of his two poles. Although he saw and accepted many of the paradoxes of life, he could not accept this one that involved him so directly. Thus he repeated over and over his avowal of disinterest which was intended to exorcise the Devil's agent, vanity, and to leave him a justified man.

He showed another aspect of his Puritan spirit in a classic complaint to Abigail: "There are very few people in this world with whom I can converse," he wrote. "I can treat all with decency and civility, and converse with them, when it is necessary, on points of business. But I am never happy in their company."[6] The very phrase "small talk" was repugnant to him. Conversation was a kind of sacrament. It should be entered into with thoughtfulness, even devotion. Wit and humor were proper elements of good conversation, but mind must touch mind and heart touch heart. The casual, the trivial, the irrelevant were a kind of desecration, a debasement of the Word which was holy, was from God, which separated man from animal and thus was not to be abused. Moreover the New England chill must be melted in the circle of companionship, good faith and good cheer. A New Englander was hooded, shrouded; he recoiled from a spontaneous and affectionate touch or gesture as from a snake. All this perhaps because he understood, however dimly, the terrible vulnerability and nakedness of the human soul. He had good reason to know, for the Puritan was the first man to stand alone before God and the world without the comfort of ritual, of forms and orders, traditions, customs and formalities, without, above all, any enrichment by the visual arts in the prolonged absence of which the soul withers. Alone, in an alien land, the New England man had to fashion out of nothing but the simple lumber of his faith a coherent, inhabitable world, and endure without respite the almost unbearable strain of that astonishing enterprise. It was hardly to be wondered that out of such an agony of birth came much that was twisted and wrenched from the fairest human shape and much more that was to be deeply and enduringly American and that was also great then, and in its successive transformations—theological, political, literary, social.

Although Adams was convinced, as he wrote Warren, that the May 15 resolution was "the most important resolution that was ever taken in America," it was not enough. Much more remained to be done and Adams was anxious to be about it. Maryland was one of the procrastinating colonies and John, in a letter to Samuel Chase, denounced "your trimmers, your double-tongued and double-minded men, your disguised folk"—they were worse than the outright Tories.[7] He was even more indignant with New York. Why should that colony "continue to embarrass the continent? Must it be so forever?" he asked Samuel Parsons. "One would think that their proximity to New England would assimilate their opinions and principles. Have they no sense, no feeling, no sentiment, no passions? . . . Is there anything in the air or soil of New York unfriendly to the spirit of liberty? Are the people destitute of reason or of virtue?" New York, it appeared, would have the honor of being the very last of all in imbibing the genuine principles and the true system of American policy. "Perhaps she will never entertain them at all," he added.[8]

He was more tolerant of the "junto" of Pennsylvania Quakers and adherents of the proprietary interest who blocked that colony's acceptance of independence. They must have their wings clipped, but afterward justice must be done them and their religious scruples respected.[9] He reassured a constituent that the delay in declaring independence had a positive side. "Some people," he wrote Benjamin Kent, "must have time to look around them; before, behind, on the right hand, and on the left; then to think, and, after all this, to resolve." Others see "at one intuitive glance into the past and future, and judge with precision at once. . . . You cannot make thirteen clocks strike precisely alike at the same second."[10]

In Philadelphia the great engine of independence which had at last been placed upon the tracks by the Adamses and Richard Henry Lee was gathering speed. General Washington had been summoned to confer with Congress on plans for the coming campaign. Adams was a member of the committee of Congress to concert plans with Washington and his staff. The radical Whigs of the colony held a kind of rump convention presided over by Daniel Roberdeau.

A makeshift stage had been erected in the State House yard and, while the leaden skies poured rain on the participants, Roberdeau, McKean, Cadwallader and Matlack addressed the sodden crowd. Roberdeau opened proceedings by reading, "with a loud stentorian voice that might be heard a quarter of a mile," the resolve of Congress. Then the audience "though so wet" gave three enthusiastic cheers and threw their hats into the air.

After a number of speeches the crowd voted a series of resolutions, among them that the instructions of the Pennsylvania Assembly to the delegates in Congress had "a dangerous tendency to withdraw this Province from that happy union with the other Colonies which we consider both as our glory and protection"; and, finally, that the resolve of Congress made it necessary to form a new government and that the Assembly being clearly inadequate for the task a convention should be called to frame a constitution for the state. On the fifth of June, with the call already out for a provincial convention to meet on the eighteenth of the month, the Pennsylvania Assembly gave way and directed a committee to bring in new instructions for the delegates to Congress. Two days later Richard Henry Lee, acting on instructions from the Virginia convention, brought in "certain resolutions respecting independency," principally "that the Congress should declare that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states . . . and that all political connection between them and the state of Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved." The Pennsylvania delegates, waiting for their new instructions, voted against the motion. But the next day their instructions arrived, authorizing them "to concur with the other delegates in Congress, in forming such further compacts between the United Colonies, concluding such treaties with the foreign kingdoms and states, and in adopting such other measures as shall be judged necessary for promoting the liberty, safety and interests of America."

With this action, equivocating as it was, another obstacle had presumably been cleared away, but the Pennsylvania delegates continued to procrastinate. The people of the colonies "were not yet ripe for bidding adieu to the British connection." Congress should never take "any capital step" until "the voice of the people" drove them into it. The individual colonies were independent of each other and therefore Congress could not make a declaration binding them all; the Pennsylvania Assembly was sitting in the chamber above; a convention, especially called to consider the matter of independence, would assemble in ten days; the convention of New York was sitting also and those of New Jersey and Delaware would meet the following Monday and doubtless declare the sentiment of those states on the issue of independency. If a declaration of independence was passed at once, "these delegates must retire, and possibly their colonies might secede from the Union." Further, it was prudent to agree on a form of government between the various colonies before declaring independence.

John Adams, joined by Lee and Wythe, answered that no one presumed to argue against the fact of the necessity of independence. The most that had been said was that the present moment was not the time. Adams reviewed the case for independence in some detail. The question was simply whether the time had come to affirm what was in fact the case—that the colonies were independent of the Mother Country. As for the people, Adams insisted, "they are in favor of the measure, though the instructions given by some of their *representatives* are not. . . . The voice of the representatives is not always consonant with the voice of the people, and . . . this is remarkably the case in these middle colonies. . . . It would be vain to wait either weeks or months for perfect unanimity, since it was impossible that all men should ever become of one sentiment on any question." Some colonies, Adams charged heatedly, had hung back from the beginning in order to profit from the plight of the others.

He was for pressing forward with or without the dilatory colonies. The history of the Dutch Republic, where at first only three states had federated, showed that a secession was not as dangerous as endless hesitation and delay.

But the reluctant colonies were immovable. Old anxieties, old jealousies and old habits were too deeply ingrained. In addition, a number of the delegates felt, quite honestly, that they were bound by the instructions of their Assemblies. Whatever the sentiment of the mass of the people might be, they had been appointed and instructed by representative bodies and these bodies, often thoroughly conservative, controlled their immediate political fates. Like all politicians, they were sensitive to the requirements for remaining in office. Adams and Lee, sensing that the temper of Congress was opposed to pushing the issue of independence, decided to allow more time for the middle colonies to "ripen." On Monday, June 10, Congress, sitting as a committee of the whole, resolved to postpone the matter of independence until the first day of July and in the meanwhile, "that no time be lost . . . that a committee be appointed to prepare a declaration to the effect of the first resolution, which is in these words: 'That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states.'"

The following day a five-man committee was appointed to frame the declaration: Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman and Robert Livingston. Jefferson was chairman of the committee. Some eight years Adams' junior, he had served in Congress for almost a year and had, the previous summer with Adams and Lee, drawn up a firm reply to Lord North's conciliatory resolution. While not himself conspicuous in debate, or a leader in the campaign for independence, the Virginian, with his light, bright coloring, coppery hair and thin, sharp-featured face, had been a loyal soldier in the ranks of those working for a complete separation from Great Britain. He had acquired something of a reputation as an author by his critique of the rights of the colonists and the powers of Parliament, entitled "A Summary View of the Rights of the British Colonists," which had been read with approval by patriots in all the colonies. With his competence as an expositor of the patriot case well established, Jefferson was given the task of drawing up a draft of the declaration.

On the same day that Adams was appointed to the committee to prepare a declaration of independence, he was made a member of another committee with Dickinson, Franklin, Robert Morris and Benjamin Harrison, "to prepare a plan of treaties to be proposed to foreign powers." Still a third committee was elected to draw up a plan of confederation for the colonies. It fell to Adams' lot to do most of the tedious work of drawing up the plan of treaties and he spent the better part of June at this labor. Finally Congress, in a perfect whirl of activity and enterprise, provided for the establishment of a committee to be called the Board of War and Ordnance. John Adams was elected chairman, which made him, in effect, Secretary of War in addition to his duties as a congressional delegate. It was, he wrote Abigail, "an honor to which I never aspired, a trust to which I feel myself vastly unequal. But I am determined to do as well as I can and make industry supply, in some degree, the place of abilities and experience. The Board sits every morning and every evening."[11]

His duties as chairman of the Board of War and Ordnance proved to be his most important and most onerous congressional chore. The Board was, among other things, charged with keeping an accurate roster "of all officers of the land forces of the United Colonies, with their rank and the dates of their respective commissions; and also regular accounts of the state and disposition of the troops in the respective colonies," as well as "exact accounts of all the artillery, arms, ammunition and warlike stores belonging to the United Colonies . . . and . . . the immediate care of all such . . . warlike stores." The Board was further responsible for "the raising, fitting out, and dispatching [of] all such land forces as may be ordered for the service of the United Colonies"; for the care of prisoners of war and the handling and filing of all correspondence dealing directly with the waging of war against Great Britain. For all this the committee was to have a secretary and one or more clerks appointed by Congress.

While Jefferson worked on the declaration and Adams struggled with a sudden flood of new duties as chairman of the Board of War and Ordnance, the colonies "ripened." Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant returned to New Jersey to bring that colony to the side of independence; on the fifteenth of June he wrote from Burlington: "We are passing the Rubicon and our delegates in Congress on the first of July will vote plump." New Jersey was joined by Maryland which, prodded by Samuel Chase, had voted unanimously "for independence, etc., etc."[12]

Things thus moved toward a climax. Jefferson had a draft of the declaration and the committee reviewed it. Franklin made several changes and Adams half a dozen more, and the document was ready to be presented to Congress. But first must come the resolution declaring independence. The first of July was the day set for final discussion and, Adams hoped, approval of the resolution which Lee had presented almost two months before. That morning Adams was up even earlier than usual. He reviewed the strategy mapped out with Lee and Sam, rehearsed his own remarks in case he should have to speak for the resolution, and wrote Archibald Bulloch, formerly delegate from Georgia, now Governor of that colony: "This morning is assigned for the greatest debate of all. A declaration, that these colonies are free and independent states, has been reported by a committee appointed some weeks ago for that purpose, and this day or tomorrow is to determine its fate. May Heaven prosper the newborn republic and make it more glorious than any former republics have been!"[13]

When Congress assembled it fell to John Dickinson, as leader of the opposition to independence, to carry the burden of the fight against Lee's resolution. He spoke with "ardent zeal," at "great length," and "with all his eloquence," but with "politeness and candor."

After Dickinson finished and sat down there was a pause that grew to uncomfortable length. The premier orator of reconciliation had spoken. Who should answer him? The place was perhaps more nearly Adams' than any other delegate's. In any event, Adams was not inclined to let the last word go to his opponent by default. He stood up to reply, short, stout, florid, admirable and maddening, respected even by those who most disliked him. He had not, though never a man needed them more, the talents of the ancient orators, of a Pericles, a Demosthenes, a Cicero or Cato, he declared, but the issue before them might safely be trusted to the guide of "plain understanding and common sense." Having made the traditional disclaimer, he went on to make the most notable speech of his life, reviewing in careful detail the legal and constitutional arguments, the measures of the ministers and Parliament against colonial liberties, the successive steps of the deepening crisis, the outbreak of armed conflict, the efforts at reconciliation and, finally, the inevitability of independence and the advantages to be gained by declaring it at once.

Before the final question was put, the New Jersey delegates came in. Although their instructions empowered them to vote for independence they did not make such a vote mandatory, and the delegates expressed a desire to have the arguments for independence summarized. Again there was a pause. Adams was the logical man. Edward Rutledge approached him, laughed and announced that he must undertake the chore. "Nobody will speak but you upon this subject, Mr. Adams. You have all the topics so ready that you must satisfy the gentlemen from New Jersey." It was Adams' turn to protest that he was not an actor or gladiator to be summoned to perform before every new audience. He would be embarrassed to repeat what he had just finished saying, what he had indeed said twenty times before. But Dr. Witherspoon, one of the New Jersey delegates, perhaps feeling he had a commitment to education, made a point of it and Adams proceeded to recapitulate, as briefly as he could, the main lines of argument. One of the New Jersey delegation, Richard Stockton, reported to his son, soon after the passage of the resolution for independence, that "the man to whom the country is most indebted for the great measure of independency is Mr. John Adams of Boston. I call him the Atlas of American independence. He it was who sustained the debate, and by the force of his reasoning demonstrated not only the justice but the expediency of the measure."[14]

Following Adams' speech, a hasty canvass showed only nine states firm for independence. Adams was disgusted. Despite "the generous and unanimous vote" of Maryland and New Jersey's acceptance of independence, Congress was four states short of unanimity. South Carolina, led by Edward Rutledge, was opposed to independence, as was Pennsylvania. Delaware's two delegates were split, and the New York members, still insisting that their instructions bound their hands, abstained. The union of the colonies seemed to hang by a slender thread; beyond that the effectiveness of a declaration of independence subscribed to by only nine states would be much diminished. It would advertise divisions rather than affirm solidarity. But there was still hope that the fissure might be repaired. Caesar Rodney, an absent delegate from Delaware, was a firm friend of independence. Thomas McKean, the pro-independence delegate of that colony, dispatched a messenger to Rodney at his home some ninety miles away, urging him to hasten back for a showdown vote the following day. Adams and Lee prevailed on Edward Rutledge to concede that, if Deleware and Pennsylvania supported independence, South Carolina would suppress its misgivings and, for the sake of colonial unity, follow suit. If the rumor was true that the New York convention had released the delegates of that colony from the injunction to oppose independence and the word was on the way, Pennsylvania, large, prosperous, strategically located as the stomach and bowels of the confederation, was the final stumbling block. That colony had seven delegates—Franklin, John Morton, Wilson, Thomas Willing, Robert Morris, Dickinson, and Charles Humphreys. The first three were ready to support independence, the last four were opposed. Arguments and exhortations failed to shake them. Finally a compromise was agreed upon; Morris and Dickinson would not officially take their seats, thus Wilson, Morton and Franklin could overbear Humphreys and Willing and carry the colony for independence.

The "great debate," as Adams called it, had turned out to be "an idle mispence of time, for nothing was said," he wrote Samuel Chase, "but what had been repeated and hackneyed in that room before, a hundred times, for six months past." Adams, who had had a finger in all the maneuverings that followed adjournment, felt confident, however, that it would pass the next day, "perhaps almost with unanimity." But he added, with characteristic realism, "If you imagine that I expect this declaration will ward off calamities from this country, you are much mistaken. A bloody conflict we are destined to endure. This has been my opinion from the beginning. . . . If you imagine that I flatter myself with happiness and halycon days after a separation from Great Britain, you are mistaken again. I do not expect that our new government will be so quiet as I could wish, nor that happy harmony, confidence and affection between the colonies that every good American ought to study, labor and pray for, for a long time. But freedom is a counterbalance for poverty, discord and war, and more. It is your hard lot and mine to be called into life at such a time. Yet," he added, "even these times have their pleasures."[15]

As the session of July 2 opened to the accompaniment of squalls of rain, there was a perceptible tension in the air. It was almost as though a skillful playwright had created the scene with an eye to dramatic effect. Pennsylvania, barring any last-minute change of heart by Morris or Dickinson, was certain for independence. South Carolina had promised to fall into line; New York would, at worst, abstain. Word had reached Congress that Rodney was on his way and attention focused on Delaware, a little sliver of a colony, one of the youngest of the thirteen.

Congress took up the morning in trivial matters and then, just as the delegates reassembled after lunch, Rodney dashed up, muddy and soaked to the skin, his small, round face with its livid cancer sore showing strain and exhaustion. His arrival brought Delaware into the side of independence, South Carolina followed, and, with the New Yorkers holding aloof, the delegates, voting by colony, carried the resolution for independence; twelve for, none opposed. By such a precarious margin, so late in the day, was independence resolved on and the appearance and fact of continental unity preserved. It had taken much "management," but it was done at last. John sat down the next day to write the news to Abigail. He began his letter with trivia of family and friends—mention of a petition from Dr. Bulfinch to open a hospital at Boston; a letter from Abigail's cousin, Polly Palmer; Katy Quincy's inoculation for smallpox—and then the great news: "Yesterday the greatest question was decided which ever was debated in America, and a greater, perhaps, never was nor will be decided among men." A resolution had been passed "without one dissenting colony" declaring the colonies to be "free and independent states."

From this triumphant moment Adams looked back fifteen years to James Otis' argument on the writs of assistance. It was there, in a crowded Superior Court room in the Town House, that the first act in the drama of American independence had been played; there with John scribbling notes, with the Boston bar in attendance, the Crown officials, Benjamin Prat, his twisted little body shrouded in the vast black cape, Thomas Hutchinson presiding as Chief Justice—that had been the extraordinary, unforgettable instant. As he reviewed "the series of political events, the chain of causes and effects" that had followed, John confessed to Abigail his surprise "at the suddenness as well as the greatness of this revolution!" It seemed to him that Britain had been "filled with folly, and America with wisdom; at least," he added, "this is my judgment.

Time must determine. It is the will of Heaven that the two countries should be sundered forever." The path to freedom and dignity as a great nation would not be easy; America must suffer "calamities still more wasting, and distresses yet more dreadful." Yet even in such suffering much might be gained; Americans might be purged of some of their vices. "The furnace of affliction produces refinements in states as well as individuals," he wrote, "and the new governments we are assuming in every part will require a purification from our vices, and an augmentation of our virtues, or they will be no blessings." The generality of the people would, in the new governments, have almost unbounded power, and the people, he added somberly, were as addicted to "corruption and venality" as individuals of wealth and position. "But I must submit all my hopes and fears to an overruling Providence, in which, unfashionable as the faith may be, I firmly believe.

"Had a declaration of independency been made seven months ago," he added, "it would have been attended with many great and glorious effects," among them treaties with foreign powers and the conquest of Canada. But, on the other hand, there had been great advantages in the delay. "The hopes of reconciliation which were fondly entertained by multitudes of honest and well-meaning, though weak and mistaken, people have been gradually and at last totally extinguished. Time has been given for the whole people maturely to consider the great question of independence, and to ripen their judgment, dissipate their fears, and allure their hopes, by discussing it in newspapers and pamphlets, by debating it in assemblies, conventions, committees of safety and inspection, in town and county meetings, as well as in private conversations, so that the whole people, in every colony of the thirteen, have now adopted it as their own act. This will cement the union and avoid those heats, and perhaps convulsions, which might have been occasioned by such a declaration six months ago."

It also occurred to him that the second of July, the day of the resolution respecting independency, should be marked down as a holiday, "the most memorable epoch in the history of America." He was sure, he wrote Abigail, "that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival." It ought to be commemorated "by a solemn act of devotion to God Almighty," under Whose providential care it had come about. "It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forevermore." The second of July must remind Americans, lest they grow lazy and complacent, of the cost of freedom.[16]

To Richard Cranch's mention of his exultation at the Declaration of Independence, Adams replied, "Is not the change we have seen astonishing? Would any man, two years ago, have believed it possible to accomplish such an alteration in the prejudices, passions, sentiments and principles of these thirteen little states as to make every one of them completely republican, and to make them own it? Idolatry to monarchs, and servility to aristocratical pride, was never so totally eradicated from so many minds in so short a time."[17]

After the passage of the resolution declaring the colonies independent, Congress proceeded to debate the Declaration of Independence drafted by Jefferson. Those delegates who still clung to the hope of reconciliation objected to what they felt were slights against the English people, and these were deleted. There remained the matter of the strictures against slavery. Here South Carolina and Georgia, dependent on the importation of slaves, objected and found some support among Northerners who had wealthy slave traders among their constituents. Again the passage was sacrificed for the sake of unanimity.

The delegates proceeded paragraph by paragraph through the paper, altering a word here, a phrase there. The splendid opening sentences, dignified, orotund, like the opening bars of a majestic symphony, passed without question. Of the self-evident truths, that which stated that men "are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights" was changed to read "certain inalienable rights." The next sentence was at the same time the most conventional and the most original. John Locke, writing in 1687, had declared that all men had common rights to "life, liberty, and property." This was the famous Lockean triad that, like the Christian trinity, contained all that was needed for political salvation. It came as naturally to the tongue of an eighteenth-century politician as "Our Father . . ." would to a devout Christian. Property, as we have suggested elsewhere, was the basic liberty, because until a man was secure in his property, until it was protected from arbitrary seizure, life and liberty could mean little. At the same time, as we have also seen in numerous writings of Adams himself, the happiness of the governed was generally conceded to be the true end of all legitimate governments. It was Jefferson's inspiration to substitute "the pursuit of happiness" for the third right of the Lockean trinity. However doubtful the phrase might be in orthodox dogma, political or theological, it was a unique and most appropriate American alteration.

The other changes were minor and almost without exception improvements. After the classic (again Lockean) statement of the right of peoples who constituted their governments to overthrow them when they became despotic and tyrannical, there came a long list of particular abuses and usurpations which had made the break with the Mother Country more or less inevitable. At the end several paragraphs containing what critics hostile to the American cause might deride as dubious constitutional theory were struck out, and the document, as revised, was approved on July 4 by all of the delegates present except John Dickinson, a holdout to the end. It was another month before the engrossed copy was signed. By then, the composition of Congress had changed; some delegates who had voted for independence had left Philadelphia; others who had voted against it had been replaced. The dissenting delegates from Pennsylvania, for instance, had been replaced and, of those who signed, five had not been delegates when the resolution and the declaration were approved.

Of Adams' views and opinions, it is perhaps worth saying something at this juncture. Throughout his life he expressed a number of points of view, many of them about the same issues and problems, and many of them contradictory. Historians are generally uncomfortable in the face of contradictions and paradoxes. But life is full of both; professors may be rational but life is not. John Adams was often paradoxical, and since it did not worry him unduly, it should not worry historians. On one day John Adams loved the people of New England and saw in them every virtue and, if not every grace, almost every quality deserving of admiration and applause. On other days (sometimes the very next day) they seemed to him a narrow, avaricious, small-spirited lot. Sometimes it was clear to him that the American people had the greatest future of any people in the world or, indeed, in the whole sweep of history; and other times he felt that only a miracle could draw the vast, sprawling continent into a brief, precarious unity. Sometimes he deplored the aristocratic spirit, sometimes the leveling one. Sometimes he ridiculed formality and ceremony; at others he insisted on the necessity of both if the dignity of government was to be upheld. Sometimes he warned against innovation, and then again denounced those who resisted change. Part of this seeming inconsistency was, of course, simply Adams' response to the ordinary alternations of social and political life. We are not always threatened by the same dangers. Today's creative dream is often tomorrow's inflexible dogma; and since Adams had a strong vein of practical realism in his character, he responded quickly to new hazards that imperiled his beloved republic-in-the-making. Certainly an aspect of his inconsistency was the classic conflict in him between realism and idealism. He dared to dream bold and magnificent dreams, yet, unlike many dreamers, he was so solidly planted in the real world that he was always acutely conscious of the gap between the hoped-for and that which might be achieved in an imperfect universe.

Beyond that, as a passionate and committed man inclined to intense introspection he was swept alternately by tides of optimism and despair. Beyond *that,* many of the inconsistencies we have been speaking about were simply the natural response of any thoughtful and religious man to the ironies and paradoxes of the human condition.

When all this has been said, it must be added, of course, that Adams, as we shall see, showed in many ways an extraordinary consistency throughout his life. In his fundamental convictions—the moral basis of life, the need for religion, the authority of a divine Being, the necessity of balance and refinement in government, his orthodox view of the nature of original sin, his veneration for the law, his belief in the civilized as opposed to the "natural" man—in all these he was remarkably steadfast. Insights achieved in his early twenties remained with him to his death almost three quarters of a century later, possibly wearing a different costume but nonetheless recognizable for that.

On July 8 the Declaration of Independence was published and "proclaimed from that awful stage in the State House yard"; "by whom do you think?" wrote Adams to Chase; "by the committee of safety; the committee of inspection, and a great crowd of people. Three cheers rended the welkin. The battalion paraded the common and gave a feu de joy, notwithstanding the scarcity of powder. The bells rung all day, and almost all night. Even the chimes chimed away!"[18]

XX

WITH INDEPENDENCE at last a reality, Adams' thoughts turned more than ever to Braintree. He longed to be at home, but besides his duties as chairman of the Board of War he was concerned about the constitution that was to be framed for the confederation of the new states, a matter of "infinite delicacy, intricacy and importance."[1]

He found, living at the City Tavern with the other delegates, that they constituted "a sort of a family," which made him feel a little less lonely and forlorn. But perhaps his pleasantest diversion, as he wrote Abigail, was provided by his barber Burne—"a little dapper fellow, short and small, but active and lively," who as he worked chattered on with tales of English gentlemen whose hair he had dressed and whose faces he had shaved at Bath in old England and at court. He was full of droll stories about his little Quaker wife and about the militia company in which he was a sergeant, and he delighted Adams with his descriptions of the odd characters and amusing episodes he encountered in his tavern trotting.[2]

Even in Braintree, Abigail was a constant source of comfort and consolation to him. Her letters kept him alive. "The choice blessing" of his life was the fact that she had the "capacity to comprehend," as he put it, the great issues with which he was daily concerned. It was the intimacy of their intellectual as well as their emotional accord that sustained and supported him, that had carried him through "all disappointments and perplexities." He raided her letters for apt quotations from Shakespeare, the Bible, and his own favorite statesman, Sully. A passage from the latter which Abigail had sent him, he lifted out and placed verbatim in a letter to Nathanael Greene, omitting, it must be said, the quotation marks. "I really think," he wrote her when he had decided to keep a letterbook with copies of his outgoing correspondence, "that your letters are much better worth preserving than mine." So they were, according to the canons of the day, for they were much more graceful and literary, full of allusions to classical heroes and heroines, sprinkled with apt quotations from the English poets, studded with charming descriptions of landscapes, events and people.

Adams read her letters over and over again, those wise, warm, thoroughly delightful missives written in that strange little hand that was for him so evocative of its mistress—letters full of learning, wit, sauciness and, perhaps best of all, of the information he so hungered for. As he read, he imagined himself taking a walk with her "over to the common, the plain, the meadow" with "Charles in one hand and Tom in the other . . . with you, Abby on your right hand and John upon my left, to view the corn fields, the orchards, etc."[3]

John's letters were likewise an invaluable tonic to his wife. "My heart," she wrote, "is like a feather and my spirits are dancing." She had received a packet of letters from him—"a feast to me." "Oh, that I could annihilate space," she cried out. With such medicine she would surely sleep soundly that night. John's letters were such a joy to her, she confessed, that she sometimes wept over them. "Nor dare I describe," she added, "how earnestly I long to fold to my fluttering heart the object of my warmest affections; the idea soothes me. I feast upon it." She did not dare to "ruminate upon the happiness we might enjoy, lest absence become intolerable."

"I want to hear you think or see your thoughts," he replied. "The conclusion of your letter makes my heart throb more than a cannonade would. You bid me burn your letters. But I must forget you first."[4]

The letters were a mixture of love, literature, politics and farm affairs. Abigail wrote long accounts to John of the "fine spring rains," the difficulty of procuring laborers—"a man will not talk with you who is worth hiring under twenty-four pounds per year." She had let the incompetent Isaac Tirrell go and employed Belcher at a shilling a day along with Daniel Nightingale. "We are just now ready to plant," she added; "the barley looks charmingly." With the few pounds John had sent her she had paid off several debts—a small payment to Bracket, Isaac's wages, rent for her father's horse, some twelve pounds for two years' taxes. "I hardly know how I have got through these things, but it gives me great pleasure to say they are done because I know it will be an ease to your mind which amid all other cares which surround you will sometimes advert to your own little farm and to your family." The "little flock" sent their duty, Abigail reported, and when she had canvassed them for the presents they wished from Papa, all of them asked for books; quite perversely little Tom wanted a picture book of the history of the King and Queen. "It was natural for them to think of a book," Abigail added, "as that is the only present Papa has been used to make them."[5]

In July, Abigail took a trip with her sister Eliza to Mercy Warren's at Plymouth, where the brig *Defence,* from Connecticut, put in for ballast. The officers who were from Plymouth invited some Plymouth ladies, among them Mrs. Warren and her out-of-town guests, on board. It was a fine ship of sixteen guns flying the Continental flag with a crew of a hundred and seventeen; and not one word of profanity did the ladies hear. The captain, it seemed, allowed no swearing. If a sailor indulged, and that exemplary officer could not reform him, he was put on shore. The ladies were charmed. They drank tea and inspected the vessel from bridge to hold; the crew ran through a mock engagement with an enemy and the young women in the party danced with the officers on the quarterdeck to the tunes of a violin and German flute. As the ladies set off in the ship's barge for shore, the *Defence* fired a salute in honor of them, "a ceremony," Abigail wrote, "I would very readily have dispensed with."[6]

Wifelike, Abigail worried about John's health and his appearance. His clothes, she feared, "should go to rags, having nobody to take any care of you in your long absence." Moreover he did not have a proper change of clothes for the season and the muggy heat of Philadelphia would make him miserable. She heard that Congress had acquired some tea and she asked if John could get some for her. It seemed to help her migraine headaches.[7]

The smallpox was making one of its periodic ravages and Abigail decided to have herself and the children inoculated. She withheld the news from John, knowing it would worry him, but he found out about her plan and accused her of intending "to run slyly through the smallpox with the family without letting me know it, and then have sent me an account that you were all well." John Hancock, when he heard Adams fretting about the inoculation, offered his spacious Boston mansion as a hospital for Abigail and the four children. "I am very anxious about supplying you with money," John wrote. "I shall feel like a savage to be here while my family is sick at Boston. But," he added, "it cannot be avoided. I cannot leave this place without more injury to the public now than I ever could at any other time. I am in the midst of scenes of business which must not stop for anything."[8] He consoled himself a little by sending off a batch of newspapers and pamphlets to entertain Abigail, and Dr. Rush's latest advice on the care of smallpox patients.

The inoculation took promptly with Abigail and Nabby. Charles, though his arm was sore, displayed no other symptoms, and poor Tommy had to be inoculated again. Abigail felt "excruciating pain in my head and every limb and joint," sure signs that she was in the grip of the pox, but even in her misery her thoughts were of John and his health. "My anxiety for your welfare will never leave me," she wrote him, "but with my parting breath. 'Tis more important to me than all this world contains." She must get what comfort she could from the thought that her husband was serving his country, "a secondary god, the first and greatest parent," she quoted.[9]

A week after her inoculation Abigail was through the worst of the ordeal. Charles and Tommy had not a single eruption; Johnny had a perfect case, mild enough not to cause great discomfort, but unmistakable. The whole family slept upon straw mats in a room with the windows open and took exercise daily by walking about the Hancock yard. Their diet denied them salts and fats and limited them to fruits and unseasoned vegetables.

After almost three weeks Charles got the pox and was unconscious and delirious for forty-eight hours, hovering between life and death. Nabby displayed a thousand "pussels as large . . . as a green pea"[10] but it was predicted that she would have only a few pits. Adams was distressed to hear that his "sweet babe Charles" was ill. But, he added, "He is not mine but conditionally, and subject to the will of a Superior, whose will be done."[11]

Altogether the ordeal stretched out to five weeks of confinement in Boston. Abigail, tired and debilitated, missed John more than ever—his warmth and responsiveness, his affection and his delight in his family. His appetite for life corresponded with her own. "Deliver me," she wrote, "from your cold phlegmatic preachery, politicians, friends, lovers and husbands. I thank heaven I am not so constituted myself and so connected."[12]

John could not come home himself to nurse her through her ordeal, but he sent the next best thing, a canister of tea, carried by Elbridge Gerry, who was going back to Boston. Adams wrote her that the tea was on the way but warned her that Gerry was "an old bachelor and, what is worse, a politician and, what is worse still, a kind of soldier," so that he would doubtless tarry a long time along the way. Worse than that, Gerry delivered the tea by mistake to Mrs. Samuel Adams, an embarrassing contretemps that Abigail discovered when she went to call on Mrs. Samuel Adams and was served, with a triumphant flourish, tea—her tea as it turned out.

John had sent off the news of independence to Abigail by the first post, as we have seen. Abigail was delighted. It was, she felt sure, a harbinger "of the future happiness and glory of our country. Nor am I a little gratified," she added, "when I reflect that a person so nearly connected with me has had the honor of being a principal actor in laying a foundation for its future greatness. May the foundation of our new constitution be Justice, Truth, Righteousness! Like the wise man's house, may it be founded upon those rocks and then neither storms nor tempests will overthrow it!"[13]

On July 18, Abigail went with a great crowd into King Street to hear the Declaration of Independence read by Colonel Crafts from the balcony of the State House. The throng of people massed in the streets listened without a sound to every word, and when Crafts finished the cry was raised, "God save our American states," followed by three resounding cheers. The bells in the churches were rung, the cannon fired, the privateers in the harbor set off their six-pounders, the platoons of soldiers discharged their muskets, "and every face appeared joyful." James Bowdoin gave the crowd's sentiment to carry away with them—"Stability and perpetuity to American independence"—and after lunch the King's arms were dismounted from the State House to the accompaniment of loud applause and some ribald wit, and burned in the street. "Thus ends royal authority in this state," Abigail noted exultantly.[14]

With independence declared, Adams watched with intense interest the various states frame their constitutions, "as fast as children build cob houses." A majority of the delegates to the Pennsylvania constitutional convention were radical democrats, among them David Rittenhouse, James Cannon and Timothy Matlack. "Thus," he wrote, "you see the effect of men of fortune, acting against the sense of the people." They—the conservative, the moderate, educated men—putting their own interests in opposition to the people rather than undertaking to exercise effective leadership, had brought a reaction in which they had been swept aside and replaced by popular leaders who would almost certainly run to extremes in their efforts to curry favor with the voters. It was a lesson that Adams never allowed himself to forget: a leader, by definition, must have followers.

Adams was disturbed to see the convention, presided over by the wise eminence, Benjamin Franklin, adopt a single-branch legislature in opposition to the basic tenet of the Adams system. It meant that the levelers were and doubtless would remain dominant in the councils of the state. The radical theories of Tom Paine, James Cannon, the professor of natural philosophy at the college of Philadelphia, and the "brawling Dr. Young," a kind of peripetic revolutionary who went from state to state spreading his subversive doctrines, were taking root right under his nose. To make it worse, the revered Franklin had given the whole unfortunate proceeding his sanction and approval. "No country ever will be long happy, or ever entirely safe and free, which is thus governed," he wrote to Francis Dana.[15]

The opponents of the Pennsylvania constitution seized on Adams' *Thoughts on Government* as ammunition to use against their opponents. "Much against my will, I assure you," he wrote Abigail, "for although I am no admirer of the form of this government, yet I think it is agreeable to the body of the people, and if they please themselves they will please me. And I would not choose to be impressed into the service of one part or the other, and I am determined I will not enlist." But the more he thought about the Pennsylvania constitution, the more uneasy he became.[16]

"We live," he wrote Abigail, "in the age of political experiments. Among many that will fail, some, I hope, will succeed. But Pennsylvania will be divided and weakened, and rendered much less vigorous in the cause by the wretched ideas of government which prevail in the minds of many people in it."[17]

The Revolution was both an opportunity and a danger. It had released the forces of irrationalism, violence and expediency which, as Thucydides had pointed out in his account of the Corcyraean rebellion, were the inevitable by-products of revolution, of "loosening the bonds of society." It had brought a deep anti-intellectualism to the surface of national life, and done so when the current of greatest need was to expand "the genius of this country," to educate, to enlighten, to train and discipline the generation into whose hands the ship of state must finally be delivered. The American mind had been confined by its subordinate and colonial status and there was, in Adams' opinion, "not a little danger of its becoming still more contracted. If a sufficient scope is not allowed for the human mind to exert itself," he warned, "if genius and learning are not sufficiently encouraged, instead of improving by this Revolution, we shall become more despicably narrow, timid, selfish, base and barbarous."

Adams' own thoughts on government were still changing. He was pleased with the Virginia constitution, which gave very little power to the chief executive of the state, and he even recommended that in the constitution of his own state the Governor, or President, be no more than the head of the upper house, or Council. "Our people," he wrote, "will never submit to more, and I am not clear that they should." The two-branch legislature, however, remained a test of basic political orthodoxy. He wrote to Dana that if the provincial convention "should establish a single Assembly as a legislature . . . it would grieve me to the very soul. However," he added, "the right of the people to establish such government as they please will ever be defended by me, whether they choose wisely or foolishly."[18]

As Adams watched the new governments, he was surprised that they were so democratic. "Their plans are remarkably popular," he wrote Abigail, "more so than I could ever have imagined"; even more popular than the *Thoughts on Government*. For their chief executives the colonies had chosen men of "capacity, spirit and zeal" rather than "fortune, family and every other consideration which used to have weight with mankind." Some of those left out, like Robert Morris and John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, Adams wished might "be restored at a fresh election, because, although mistaken in some points, they are good characters, and their weight and numerous connections will contribute to strengthen America and cement her union."[19]

In Congress the delegates turned their attention to the nature of the new constitution that should bind the confederation together. Here the most important issue, again, was the matter of representation. Should each colony have a single vote, or should the colonies be represented in proportion to their size and wealth? "You love to pick a political bone," John wrote Abigail, "so I will throw it to you." Another knotty problem was "whether Congress shall have authority to limit the dimensions of each colony." Virginia, for example, claimed a western boundary reaching to the Pacific Ocean and taking in almost a third of the American continent. If Congress recognized Virginia's claim that state would grow in time to overshadow all its neighbors.

To Jefferson's challenge that the boundaries of the Southern colonies were fixed, Samuel Chase of little Maryland replied, "No colony has a right to go to the South Sea; they never had; they can't have. It would not be safe to the rest. It would be destructive to her sisters and to herself." James Wilson followed Chase to point out that the original grants were based upon a mistaken idea of the geography of North America. At the time the grants were made the Crown lawyers thought the Pacific Ocean was only a hundred miles from the Atlantic. Pennsylvania could not interfere with the grants themselves, but she could and would say that she would not join any confederation until such extravagant claims were surrendered.

Another bone of contention was the Indian problem. Every colony had had a different experience with the Indians; each one had its own interest in exploiting the savages and often these interests were in sharp conflict. Most of the colonies, or now, more properly, states, wished just enough intervention by the confederacy to secure their particular interest. Georgia, which served as a kind of buffer state against the tribes of the South, was anxious to obtain all possible help. South Carolina, which profited from a handsome trade in deerskins, was fearful that the confederacy might regulate or impede her commerce with the Indians and thus wished to be left alone to deal with them as she had in the past, carrying on her own military campaigns against them, and making her own treaties to her own advantage.

The issue was a dramatic if unwelcome indication of the very considerable complications involved in joining together in any kind of political league, however loose, thirteen such socially and economically desperate units. All they had in common was an often not particularly firm determination to resist Great Britain and they had a thousand things that set them at odds. We have already noted that Virginia and Connecticut were trying to make good claims to large sections of Pennsylvania, claims which resulted in an undeclared war. New York and New England were almost literally at muskets' muzzles over the territory that would eventually become Vermont. These were symptoms. To them might be added the issue of representation already mentioned, the Indian problem, slavery, levying and appropriating money, and many others.

When particularism seemed about to triumph on the Indian question, James Wilson rose to speak in support of the autonomy of Congress, and Adams made careful notes of his argument. There could be, the Pennsylvanian insisted, no lasting peace with the Indians unless that peace was made by one body. "No such language as this ought to be held to the Indians. 'We are stronger, we are better, we treat you better than another colony.' No power ought to treat with the Indians, but the United States." The Indians themselves knew at first hand the "striking benefits of confederation"; they had an extraordinary example in the union of the Six Nations. "None should trade with the Indians," Wilson continued, "without a license from Congress. A perpetual war would be unavoidable, if everyone was allowed to trade with them."

On July 30 the delegates took up for the second time the proposition contained in Article 17 of John Dickinson's Articles of Confederation: "In determining questions, each colony shall have one vote." Here was the single most important constitutional issue that faced the delegates. It divided the states into two groups—the large states and the small states. The large states had accepted earlier the principle of equal representation but they had done so only under the heaviest pressures and they were plainly dissatisfied with the bargain. Franklin put it most bluntly: "Let the smaller colonies give equal money and men, and then have an equal vote. . . . If they have an equal vote without bearing equal burdens, a confederation upon such iniquitous base will never last long."

Dr. Witherspoon from the small state of New Jersey replied: "Is it not plausible that the small states will be oppressed by the great ones?" Take the case of the Spartans' oppression of the Helots, or of the Romans and the states subservient to them. Every colony must be considered as a distinct person. But the question remained, if equal representation were abandoned, how were the states to be represented proportionately? By population? Or by wealth? Or by a combination of the two? The large Northern states wished to allot representation by wealth and population, but at the same time they were unwilling to count Negroes as property. The South, claiming Negroes as property and thus taxable, wished at the same time to have them counted as part of the population for purposes of representation. Article 11 of the confederation provided that contributions to defray the cost of carrying on the war should be levied on each colony "in proportion to the number of inhabitants of every age, sex and quality." Chase moved that the quotas of contribution should be fixed by the proportion of white inhabitants only, for the Negro slaves were "a species of property." To tax, say, Maryland on the basis of its slaves as well as its white population would be like taxing the New England farmer for his cattle.

Adams answered Chase. The point was, Adams maintained, that the number of inhabitants of a particular state were simply taken as an index of its wealth, in the absence of any more reliable method of computation. The question was, thus, whether Negro slaves contributed to the wealth of a state in the same way that a hired hand did on a Massachusetts farm. This was obviously the case—the servile laborer contributed to his owner's wealth and thus to that of the state in which he lived, just as the free laborer did. "Certainly five hundred freemen," he said, "produce no more profits, no greater surplus for the payment of taxes, than five hundred slaves. . . . Suppose, by an extraordinary operation of nature or of law, one half the laborers of a state could in the course of one night be transformed into slaves. Would the state be made the poorer or the less able to pay taxes? . . . The condition of the laboring poor in most countries," Adams pointed out, "that of the fishermen particularly, of the Northern states, is as abject as that of slaves. It is the number of laborers which produces the surplus for taxation, and numbers, therefore, indiscriminately, are the fair index of wealth."

James Wilson reinforced Adams by pointing out that to exempt slaves would be an encouragement to continue slave-keeping and indeed to increase it, with all its pernicious effects. But Thomas Lynch declared that if the status of slaves as people or property was even debated the confederation would be wrecked. Thus this early was the peculiar status of the Negro a subject of contention and of bitterness in Congress as it was in the nation throughout subsequent history. Were Negro slaves cattle or human beings? No more critical question could have been raised, nor one more agonizing, more cruelly paradoxical, to a people fighting for liberty. When Chase's amendment was finally put to the vote after almost five days of sporadic debate it was defeated 7 to 5, the Northern states voting nay, the Southern states ay, with Georgia divided. But it was not the last of the issue of taxation or of slavery.

Having for the moment settled the basis of taxation, the delegates returned to the knotty problem of representation. Samuel Chase promptly offered an ingenuous compromise. Confederation was essential; the large states were adamant, the small states unwilling to yield; therefore, on matters affecting property, the large states should vote proportionally and on matters affecting "life and liberty" the vote should be equal—one for each state. Franklin brushed the suggestion aside. The vote should be proportional in all cases; the instructions of the Delaware Assembly to their delegates in Congress not to confederate on such a basis showed an extraordinary narrowness and provincialism. It was a small-state man, Roger Sherman, who offered a compromise: the vote should be both by individual colonies and by proportion of inhabitants on every issue, a majority of both required for the passage of a law.

Adams rose to gainsay him. Voting in Congress must be in proportion to numbers. The delegates in Congress were representatives of the people. "Reason, justice and equity never had weight enough on the face of the earth to govern the councils of men." It was self-interest alone which guided men's actions and it was interest alone which could be trusted. It thus followed that the interests within Congress "should be the mathematical representatives of the interests without doors." The so-called individuality of the colonies was "mere sound." He would give an example: "A. has £50, B. £500, C. £1000 in partnership. Is it just they should equally dispose of the moneys of partnership?" Members had argued that the states were simply independent individuals making a bargain together. But the real question was not what were we now, but what would we be "when our bargain shall be made?" The answer again was simple enough. "The confederacy is to make us one individual only; it is to form us, like separate parcels of metal, into one common mass. We shall no longer retain our separate individuality, but become a single individual" in all questions that came before the confederacy. To the charge that a proportional vote would endanger the smaller states, Adams challenged the small-state delegates to mention one issue on which Virginia, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania would be apt to combine to the detriment of their neighbors. Small and large states alike would split on matters of interest having nothing to do with their size.

Again, Wilson ably seconded Adams. In addition to the division between large and small states, the debate revealed a division between those delegates who felt that the individual states retained their essential sovereignty and simply joined in a union to promote a few specific and carefully defined common interests, and those who, on the other hand, felt that they were engaged in creating a nation in which the states would be subordinate. The two groups would be called in time "nationalists" and "states righters," and here appeared another contrast in viewpoint or in essential political philosophy that would continue throughout American history. John Adams, along with Wilson, placed himself firmly in the camp of the nationalists—those who favored a strong central government; Thomas Jefferson, who took careful notes on Adams' argument, became the most able advocate of the states-rights position.

On July 18 "the committee to prepare a plan of treaties to be entered into with foreign states or kingdoms" brought in a report. This document, largely the work of Adams, was ordered to lie on the table. There it lay until Congress at the end of August found time from its daily business and its intermittent discussion of the confederation to resolve itself into a committee of the whole to discuss it. Adams' draft was prepared specifically with the idea of a French treaty in mind. The writing had cost him much labor and considerable research. He had pored over such printed treaties between foreign powers as were available and where applicable had adapted their language and provisions, taking care always to preserve complete freedom of action for the United States. In his opinion France had as much to gain by an alliance as America. There was, therefore, no need to go hat in hand as a humble petitioner, but proudly as a new nation, confident of its powers, determined to treat as an equal with the second power in the world. Realizing that France, if she supported the cause of the United States against Great Britain, might look for suitable compensation, he had boldly inserted a clause pledging the French King not to "invade nor under any pretense attempt to possess for himself . . . Labrador, New Britain, Nova Scotia, Arcadia, Florida" or any other city or town on the continent of North America or any island adjacent to it—"it being," Adams had written grandly, "the true intent and meaning of this treaty that the said United States shall have the sole, exclusive, undivided and perpetual possession of all the countries, cities, and towns on the said continent, and of all islands near to it, which now are or lately were under the jurisdiction of . . . the Crown of Great Britain." After almost a week of debate a revised version of Adams' plan was adopted and became the basis for United States treaty negotiations with the French Crown.

With the Declaration of Independence passed, Adams experienced once more a pang at not being able to march off at the head of a regiment of Continental troops. The departure of Colonel John Dickinson leading a contingent of Pennsylvania troops to augment General Lee's forces at New York aroused Adams' admiration and envy. "Mr. Dickinson's alacrity and spirit," he wrote Abigail, "certainly becomes his character and sets a fine example." He wished that he might "march too upon some such emergency," even, if need be, as a private soldier. Still the fact remained that Patrick Henry, who had preceded Dickinson as a politician-soldier, and Dickinson himself were more valuable to the cause as statesmen than as military leaders. However, Adams observed in an aside which fortunately did not reach the ears of the Old Dominion delegates, in colonies like Pennsylvania and Virginia "where the martial spirit is but just awakened and the people are unaccustomed to arms," it was perhaps necessary for political leaders to set an example by becoming soldiers. Much as he might yearn for the "more active, gay, and dangerous scenes" of a military campaign, Massachusetts clearly did not need his example and he was "too old and too much worn with fatigues of study" in his youth to don a uniform.

As chairman of the Board of War, Adams spurred Congress to take all possible measures for the defense of New York. Recently mustered soldiers were hastening there from Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Connecticut. "If we can stop the torrent for this campaign, it is as much as we deserve," he wrote, "for our weakness and sloth in politics the last. Next year we shall do better. New governments will bring new men into the play, I perceive; men of more mettle."

Among the duties of his office, Adams built up a wide correspondence with Continental officers. Generals Knox and Gates, Nathanael Greene and Thomas Mifflin all wrote him, trying to spur Congress to provide adequately for the Continental Army. Between the condition and the needs of the army in the field and Congress' rather abstract conception of what should be done, there was a wide and often dangerous gap. The delegates were willing to spend hours and days arguing over pay for officers and men, pensions for the wounded, bounties for enlistment and a host of similar issues as though they could be decided by reference to general principles or some arbitrarily established standard. The officers in command of the troops were constantly and painfully aware of the extraordinary problems involved simply in recruiting a citizen army maintaining it. Nathanael Greene, the brilliant Quaker general, wrote Adams early in June urging him to press upon Congress the necessity of providing pensions for soldiers who were wounded or incapacitated. This would be the most effective possible recruiting measure. Even a zealous patriot would hesitate to enlist in the fight for independence if a disabling wound must make him a pauper and impoverish his family. Greene himself had no income other than what he could earn with his own hands and if badly wounded he, like his soldiers, would be "reduced to begging for my bread." It was hard, perhaps impossible, for a well-fed and secure Congress in Philadelphia to conceive the hardships of active campaigning with an army poorly equipped, inadequately supplied, and frequently unpaid or paid in Continental bills that depreciated as fast as they were printed. "I observe," Greene wrote, "you don't think the game you are playing is so desperate as I imagine." It was true; Congress thought it had simply to pass resolutions and trained and resolute soldiers would soon appear, that it had only to direct fresh emissions of paper currency in order to create money, that letters of instruction, drawn up by committees, would produce military triumphs. "The fate of war is very uncertain," Greene reminded Adams.

Another congressional scheme, fraught with mischief, was to promote officers by merit rather than by seniority. To civilian strategists it seemed an eminently fair and reasonable system; to soldiers it threatened a Pandora's box of jealousy and bad feeling by providing an opportunity for favoritism and political maneuvering.

In addition to the considered advice of senior officers, Congress and Adams in particular received a flood of complaints and supplications from officers who deplored their inferior rank or low pay. The New England officers saw politics in the promotion of Southern officers over their Northern brothers-in-arms; the Southerners denounced the unmannerly and familiar behavior of New England privates and inquired if their relatively high pay was the principal cause of their insolence and insubordination. Daniel Hitchcock whined about his salary and about the promotion of Benedict Arnold, hero of the Canadian expedition (as far as it had any heroes), to Brigadier General, while Arnold would soon complain about not being promoted to Major General. Several of the passed-over New England officers expressed their intention of resigning, writing plaintive or indignant letters to Adams whom, as delegate from Massachusetts and chairman of the Board of War, they held at least partially responsible for their troubles. First it was Sullivan, incensed at the promotion of Gates, then Artemas Ward, then Benjamin Lincoln; Adams wrote Tudor that he did not entirely blame them. Congress refused to promote Massachusetts men because of envy.[20]

But in other cases he showed less sympathy and came indeed to feel "an inexpressible mortification" at the concern of gentlemen both in the army and in Congress over "the little circumstances of rank and ceremony," and declare himself "plagued with these frivolisms."[21] His embarrassments were increased by the fact that many of the officers appointed by the Massachusetts General Court were men of inferior quality—the "new men" of whom he had earlier complained.

He put down his misgivings in a long letter to Joseph Hawley. There was "a jealousy or an envy taking place among the multitude, of men of learning, and a wish to exclude them from the public councils and from military commands." In Massachusetts certain "awkward, illiterate, ill-bred" men had been thrust forward as officers. "This conduct," he wrote, "is sinking the character of the Province into the lowest contempt, and is injuring the service beyond description." The soldiers could not be better than their officers. Massachusetts had not its proper proportion of general officers, but the fact was that the officers that the Assembly had appointed were not worthy to be promoted to higher rank. "I fear," he added, touching a more general political note, "we shall find that popular elections are not oftener determined upon pure principles of merit, virtue and public spirit than the nominations of a court, if we do not take care. I fear there is an infinity of corruption in our elections already crept in. . . . A popular government is the worst curse to which human nature can be devoted when it is thoroughly corrupted. Despotism is better. A sober, conscientious habit of electing for the public good alone must be introduced, and every appearance of interest, favor and partiality reprobated, or you will soon make wise and honest men wish for monarchy again; nay, you will make them introduce it into America."[22]

One of Adams' principal concerns was to enlist a regular army for the duration of the war, rather than depend on short-term enlistments or state militia. "We shall never do well," he wrote General Heath "until we get a regular army, and this will never be until men are enlisted for a longer duration." This meant more generous bounties and better pay, which Congress was reluctant to grant, preferring to muddle along, living, as far as the army was concerned, from hand to mouth. The matter of promotions continued to be an especially sore point. Adams persisted in his view that while seniority might be the best general rule Congress, on the advice of commanders, should be free to make promotions on the basis of merit, and he continued to complain about the scarcity of New Englanders among the general officers. To this latter complaint he was given the answer which may have contained more than a modicum of truth—that the Yankees made the best soldiers but the Southerners the best officers.

Related to the problem of a regular army, enlisted for the duration, was that of creating an effective officer corps. Soldiers were no better than the men who led them.

William Tudor put his finger on the problem: "At the end of a campaign," he wrote, "we find butchers, bakers, sutlers with a large army of contractors, with fortunes made at the public expense, whilst a young officer of merit on twenty-six dollars a month is a beggar." The continual complaints of the Southern officers over "littleness of their pay" was having a most unhappy effect on efforts to recruit first-class officers.[23]

Here, soiling the splendid cause of liberty, were the vanity, pettiness and self-seeking which Adams well knew to be constants in human nature. But they were no less irritants for that. They made up such an endlessly dreary, almost insupportable part of his burdens; they filled him with an impatience and disgust that it was hard for him to conceal in his correspondence, and such hints as he dropped tended to further exacerbate already sensitive feelings. Take an ordinary, decent, intelligent enough man, content to mix with fellows on a free, even egalitarian basis, put him in a uniform and give him a rank and he almost invariably became touchy and rank-conscious with a tender concern for military protocol, keeping a jealous eye on those above him and an anxious eye on those below. He devoted to the matter of who should have precedence in entering or leaving a room the attention worthy of an arduous campaign; he was as gratified at winning a skirmish over rank with a fellow officer as at winning an engagement in the cause of liberty; he seemed less concerned with the fact that all men are born equal than he did with the fact that he might die a Captain while some less deserving warrior with a commission dated two weeks later than his would have the inextinguishable honor of dying a Major. But such reflections were little comfort to John Adams, who feared he would be brought unseasonably to the grave by the universal dedication of every officer, good, bad or indifferent, to the matter of rank and promotion. If officers were not writing to solicit promotion for themselves, they were busy writing to request or protest the promotion of a brother officer who might, in turn, be found writing to request or protest the original writer's promotion.

Adams wrote to William Tudor of the officers of the army, "Can't you excite in them a thirst for military knowledge? Make them inquisitive after the best writers, curious to know and ambitious to imitate the lives and actions of great captains, ancient and modern?" An officer of high rank should have a "very extensive knowledge of science, and literature, men and things." He should be master of the laws and constitution of his own country; "he should have a keen penetration and a deep discernment of the tempers, natures and characters of men. . . . He should have a patient self-government superior to all flights and transports of passion. He should have a candor and moderation above all prejudices and partialities"; he should be a talented letter writer and "perfect master of American geography."[24]

From the Generals, Adams solicited detailed "efficiency reports" on the officers under their commands. How did they rate, he wanted to know, on discipline, courage, experience, knowledge of their new calling, and personal morals? He cautioned especially about the responsibility of all officers to keep a close eye to the behavior of the men under their command. Swearing, the universal curse of armies, was not to be permitted, nor were drinking and gambling. Cleanliness was also of first importance. A dirty army was invariably a bad one.[25]

As a kind of *de facto* Secretary of War of the United Colonies, Adams was obsessed with the problem of discipline. Word that reached him from the ill-fated Canadian expedition indicated that a primary cause of that disaster was a lack of discipline. As he wrote Heath and other general officers, the greatness of republican Rome had been built on discipline. "The American army," he noted, "will stand or fall . . . according as it adheres to or deviates from the same discipline. . . . The army," he added, "must be well officered, armed, disciplined, fed, clothed, covered and paid—in these respects we do as well as we can. Time, I hope, will assist us, and every officer of the army would do well to suggest to his friends and correspondents in Congress and in the legislatures of the several states every defect and every improvement in those particulars which occurs to him."

"If I were an officer," he wrote Abigail, "I am convinced I should be the most decisive disciplinarian in the army. I am convinced there is no other effective way of indulging benevolence, humanity and the tender social passions in an army. There is no other way of preserving the health and spirits of the men. There is no other way of making them active and skillful in war; no other way of guarding an army against destruction by surprises; and no other method of giving them confidence in one another, of making them stand by one another in the hour of battle. Discipline in an army is like the laws in a civil society. There can be no liberty in a commonwealth where the laws are not revered and most sacredly observed, nor can there be happiness or safety in an army for a single hour when discipline is not observed."[26]

A general should keep his men constantly in training and by his presence at their exercises create "good order" and high morale. As for forts and entrenchments, they were slender reeds; they bred a false sense of security and a defensive rather than offensive psychology in their garrisons.[27] "I am so vexed sometimes," he wrote General Parsons, "as almost to resolve to make interest to be a colonel myself. I have almost vanity enough to think that I should make a figure in such a group. But a treacherous, shattered constitution is an eternal objection against my aspiring at military command. If it were not for this insuperable difficulty I should certainly have imitated Old Noll Cromwell, in one particular, that is, in launching into military life after forty."[28]

Adams' own convictions about the importance to an army of order and discipline were reinforced by the report of his friend Benjamin Rush, Surgeon General, who had gone into the British camp under flag of truce to care for American wounded. "They pay a supreme regard to the cleanliness and health of their men," he wrote, noting that "there is the utmost order and contentment in their hospitals." They had even taken excellent care of the Continental soldiers wounded in battle. "It would take a volume," he added, "to tell you of the many things I saw and heard which tend to show the extreme regard that our enemies pay to discipline, order, economy and cleanliness among their soldiers." In the American army, by contrast, all was confusion and disorder, especially in medical establishments where there were "waste . . . peculation . . . unnecessary officers, etc. . . . enough to sink our country without the weights which oppress it from other quarters." The night before over a hundred of the American wounded had gotten drunk to numb their pain and misery and no one had checked them. "A soldier," Rush observed, "should never forget for a single hour that he has a master. One month in our hospital would undo all the discipline of a year." Rush concluded darkly: "My dear friend, we are on the brink of ruin. . . . New measures and new men alone can save us." Rush was a champion of six-month enlistments and wrote caustically of men abandoned enough to enlist for three years. The diagnosis Adams did not doubt, but the remedy—new officers and six-month enlistments—would be the end of anything like an army.[29]

One of the stormiest figures among the generals was Benedict Arnold. Hot-tempered and arrogant, he offended many of the delegates with his tartly worded and peremptory communiqués, but he was a fighting general and Adams cherished him. "I am wearied to death," he wrote Abigail, "with the wrangles between military officers, high and low. They quarrel like cats and dogs. They worry one another like mastiffs, scrambling for rank and pay like apes for nuts. I believe there is no one principle which predominates in human nature so much, in every stage of life from the cradle to the grave, in males and females, old and young, black and white, rich and poor, high and low, as this passion for superiority."

He had seen it among boys and girls at school, lads at college, lawyers at the bar, among the clergy, in clubs, at town meetings, in Congress, "and among ladies everywhere," but he had never seen it "operate with such keenness, ferocity and fury as among military officers. They will go terrible lengths in their emulation, their envy and revenge in consequence of it."[30]

General Sullivan was equally indignant about the promotions of Congress. "If a man is intoxicated every afternoon and employs himself well in cursing and kicking officers much better than himself" but "writes a good letter and dances a minuet . . . is a jolly companion and can neglect his duty with good grace by dancing attendance to persons of influence he is sure to be promoted and esteemed." For his own part, since he could neither write nor dance, he was sure he would never be promoted.[31]

In his impatience with the performance of the officers, Adams was tempted to advocate a policy of appointing them every year. "I hope," he wrote William Tudor, "we shall e'er long renounce some of our monarchial corruptions, and become republicans in principle, in sentiment, in feeling and in practice—and among other republican institutions I hope we shall annually elect all our general officers—this would purge us of some impurities."[32]

Adams' other great headache was procurement and, while this was not his direct responsibility, it was certainly indirectly so, for the condition and efficiency of the troops were to a degree at least proportional to the adequacy of their equipment, clothing, food and pay as Adams knew well enough. Logistics was perhaps the greatest branch of the science of war. "Men must be furnished with good and wholesome provisions in sufficient plenty, and well covered with barracks and tents, they must be kept warm, with suitable fuel." But if we have always with us the rank-conscious officer, we have, equally, that far less estimable figure, the profiteering army contractor. Many a patriotic merchant succumbed to the temptation to make a good, more-than-fair profit. They were especially susceptible since no one could very well say what a fair profit was. With Congress printing money like redemption coupons and inflation raising the cost of living by sometimes as much as ten per cent a month, with procedures and policies ill defined at best, it was inevitable that much depreciating paper money and a good deal of what little specie of hard cash was expended by Congress to supply the army stuck to the fingers of the contractors concerned.

At the same time it must be said that many were honest men who provided the army with whatever material they could scrape together for their pains and ended as bankrupts, paid off in worthless paper or irredeemable securities. As Adams himself was well aware, it was a relatively simple matter to place a musket into a farmer's hand, put him through close-order drill on the village common and march him off to war. He might not make an impressive showing against veteran soldiers hammered into shape by hard-bitten sergeants and commanded by professional officers but he was at least physically present; and since he had legs, transportation was no problem. But to provide powder—above all powder (with saltpeter almost as precious as gold dust)—blankets, flints, canteens, muskets, cannon and ball, tents, uniforms, rations, money; to collect in a nonindustrial, rural economy the quantities of such materials needed to sustain an army in the field, and, once collected, to move them hundreds of miles over primitive, rutted roads in ox-drawn carts was a problem of staggering and, it often seemed, insuperable difficulty. The truth was that it was beyond the capacities of the collective colonies to produce a great part of the armament and supply. They must import most of the muskets, powder, flint, cloth and even money needed for their soldiers.

In order to discharge his duties as chairman of the Board of War effectively, Adams needed information. The officers were quick enough to criticize Congress when money and supplies were not forthcoming but they were much less inclined to provide in any systematic way the information on which Congress must base its action.

It drove Adams mad to receive infrequent and inadequate reports from the army—"vague sketches and imperfect hints," as he called them. He *must* have the fullest and most up-to-date information if he was to function properly. Tudor, as aide to Washington, was in an excellent position to bring about a reform and Adams exhorted him to try to improve the quality of the dispatches from the army at all echelons. "Read," he admonished, "the relation of the battle between Catiline and his adversaries, in Sallust. You see the combatants. You feel the ardor of battle. You see the blood of the slain, and you hear the wounded sigh and moan." This must be the model. Only the commander-in-chief and a few others performed adequately in this department of warfare. All the general officers should make themselves masters "of the epistolary style, which is easy, natural, simple and familiar, and of the historical style, too, which is equally simple, although a little more grave, solemn and noble." Their models should be, besides Sallust, Xenophon and Caesar.

It is not hard to imagine the response Adams' letter would have evoked from the officers of the army, if Tudor had been rash enough to press it upon them. In this grand episode, the most dramatic and magnificent in history, was it too much to expect American patriots to respond in the grand style, that colonels should write like Sallusts and brigadiers like Caesar? It did not seem so to Adams, however it might seem to the hastily mobilized, poorly trained officers who were struggling simply to survive as an army-in-being against the veteran legions of an overwhelmingly superior enemy. Adams understood well enough what was needed. In all his prescriptions he was beyond question right. What he failed to understand was just how staggeringly, how infinitely vast the task was, how slowly, how painfully, with what failures and defeats, an army is constructed. Guerrilla, or irregular, warfare is one thing. That is simple enough. Hardihood, daring, boldness of imagination, an intimate knowledge of the country—these are, generally speaking, sufficient for a highly effective band of marauders. But to put an army into the field, to equip it, to maintain it, to carry it successfully through extended campaigns is something quite different. A trained and efficient army is one of the most intricate and demanding forms of social organization. A hundred men may sign a paper which boldly proclaims the birth of a new nation; to give it effect is quite another thing.

Recruitment, discipline, supply, even tactics and strategy—it sometimes seemed that Adams was trying to fight the whole war singlehanded. The Connecticut militia had gone home in droves when their one-year enlistment was up. The Massachusetts soldiers were full of complaints. They wished to be relieved of the poll tax; they wanted bounty money for re-enlisting; they wished to be paid by lunar rather than by calendar months. "In short," Tudor wrote indignantly, "they expect to be hired and that at a very high price to defend their own liberties, and choose to be slaves unless they can be bribed to be free men. . . . The mercenary disposition of our soldiers made a gentleman observe that, had Lord North sent over guineas instead of cannon balls, New England would have been conquered in a twelvemonth,"[33] and Abigail wrote that the state had offered a bounty of forty shillings to those who enlisted for even six months. Braintree, to meet its quota, had had to raise the bounty to six pounds and, as a further incentive, had imposed a fine of ten pounds on those of military age who refused to serve. The town had drafted, by this means, forty men and boys between the ages of sixteen and fifty and half of them had been marched off to camp. The problem of recruitment was complicated in Pennsylvania, Adams complained, "by such bodies of Quakers and Mennonists who are principled against war, and others such as bodies of Tories, or cowards, or unprincipled people, who will not wage war."[34] There was, in fact, a conspicuous lack of "ardor for military glory . . . among our people," he noted. "We must all be soldiers," he wrote Samuel Cooper. "I hope there is not a gentleman in the Massachusetts Bay, not even in the town of Boston, who thinks himself too good to take his firelock and his spade. Such imminent dangers level all distinctions."[35]

On the other hand, he was pleased to observe a new martial spirit in "these middle states" which had begun to taste the sweets of war. "Ten thousand difficulties and wants occurred, which they had no conception of before. Their militia are as clamorous, and impatient of discipline, and mutinous as ours, and more so." The soldiers from Pennsylvania and the southward squatted in Philadelphia, sometimes three and four thousand at a time, waiting to be supplied with "canteens, camp kettles, blankets, tents, shoes, hose, arms, flints, and other dittoes," while the army in New York needed every man who could be mustered.[36]

Adams busied himself procuring a set of maps to hang in the office of the Board of War, and, typically, deplored to Abigail the fact that he had not been trained as a cartographer. It would have made his work much simpler. The boys must all be trained in this necessary science, presumably by Abigail.

As for tactics, he was convinced that the American soldier was too dependent on his shovel. "The practice we have hitherto been in, of ditching round about our enemies, will not always do. We must learn to use other weapons than the pick and spade. Our armies must be disciplined, and learn to fight." American officers, moreover, were not "sufficiently sensible of the importance of an observation of the King of Prussia, that stratagem, ambuscade and ambush are the sublimest chapter in the art of war." They must learn the "wiles, artifices and stratagems to deceive, decoy and overreach their adversaries. We must oppose art to art."[37]

XXI

So Adams alternated between his duties as delegate from Massachusetts and Secretary of War without portfolio. One of his minor and more pleasant congressional chores was to prepare a design for a gold medal to commemorate the evacuation of Boston and honor the besieging Continental Army. Pierre du Simitière, a French painter, had been asked to submit a design and Adams visited him in his studio to see how the work was progressing. Sitting in the shop while the Frenchman showed him sketches that he had made and chattered about his projected history of the American struggle for independence, Adams was thoroughly entertained. He was half an artist himself in his tireless observation and description of the natural world. His lack of facility with a brush or crayon was another fault of his education; he made a note to advise Abigail to have the children taught to draw and sketch.

Du Simitière's design charmed John. It showed Liberty leaning on George Washington, watching the retreating sterns of the British fleet while the American troops could be seen occupying the city. On the reverse side the artist proposed a combination of "the arms of the several nations from whence America has been peopled, as English, Dutch, German, etc." On the left side was Liberty with her cap, on the other side a rifleman with his weapon in one hand and a tomahawk in the other, his fringed and belted shirt somehow reminiscent of the garb of an unarmored Roman soldier.

John also found time to visit Charles Willson Peale's studio on Arch Street. Peale was a Marylander, a self-made painter who had started life as a poor apprentice boy, attracted a prosperous patron, studied under Benjamin West in London and returned to America to become the patriot artist of the Revolution. Adams, suspicious of the man's political radicalism, found him "a tender, soft, affectionate creature" and rather a dandy, wearing a sword and sporting gold lace on his sleeves. Peale had just finished working on a large canvas crowded with the figures of his family, his brothers and sisters, his wife and numerous children—the boys hopefully named Rubens, Rembrandt, Raphael and Titian. Adams was struck by the pleasant informality of the scene and the warm and affectionate expressions of the subjects. A more somber picture showed a mother with a dead infant upon her lap. John, recalling the baby girl he and Abigail had lost six years before, was moved to tears.

There were a number of portraits about—Washington and his lady, Franklin, Mrs. Benjamin Rush and Mrs. Francis Hopkinson among others; Adams observed that they were very well done, but Peale's work, in his opinion, fell far short of that of John Singleton Copley, the Boston-born painter who also had studied with West.

From the paintings John turned to Peale's library, taking special note of a handsome volume by Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose portraits of General Conway and Colonel Barré had been commissioned by the people of Boston and hung in Faneuil Hall. Peale showed John a portfolio of drawings made by the Italian masters which he used as models and pointed out several clay busts which, John wrote Abigail, the artist had himself fashioned "with his hands only"; among them was the head of Peale himself—an excellent likeness.

At the studio he met Francis Hopkinson, a member of Congress from New Jersey, an amateur artist, wit, poet and playwright, a spry, ebullient little figure, "one of your pretty . . . curious, ingenuous men"; his head, small and birdlike, bobbed as he talked. John thought him altogether one of the oddest beings he had ever seen, but "genteel and well bred, and . . . very social."[1]

In addition to the Du Simitière design, Adams labored with Franklin and Jefferson over the great seal of the United States. Franklin proposed Moses lifting up his rod and dividing the Red Sea, and Pharaoh in his chariot overwhelmed with the waters. The motto: "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." The symbolism was transparent. To underline it, it might be well to have Moses' features suggest those of Washington while Pharoah of course would resemble George III. Jefferson proposed the children of Israel, the chosen people of the Lord, marching through the wilderness, led by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. On the reverse side should be Hengist and Horsa, the Saxon chiefs "from whom," as Adams put it, "we claim the honor of being descended, and whose political principles and form of government we have assumed."

Hengist and Horsa would have been startled at the suggestion that the unwieldy Articles of Confederation, not yet adopted, were based on the Wutgemuld, or council, of the Saxon tribes. But this was an article of faith with the statesmen of the Revolutionary generation, and with none more than with Jefferson. A people obsessed with historical continuity found in the tribal life of the Germanic tribes a perfect model of free and representative government, and, indeed, presumed to trace there-from a line of descent, century by century, in English customs and institutions.

Adams, as might have been guessed, wished a seal that would depict in graphic form the need for virtue and the danger of vice. He proposed Hercules resting on his club. On one hand was Virtue exhorting him to ascend her rugged mountain trails, on the other Sloth "wantonly reclining on the ground, displaying her charms . . . to seduce him into vice." Adams confessed that the design was not original and was far too complicated for a seal; Abigail did not hesitate to cast her vote for Franklin's—"at least it will be most agreeable to the spirit of New England," she wrote.[2]

The thought of his wife and children enduring the pain and discomfort of inoculation made John more anxious than ever to be off for home, at least for a visit. He had been in Philadelphia six months, months that seemed like years, and he longed to smell his "bracing . . . native air." While his health had mercifully and inexplicably held up, it certainly could not last much longer without some exercise and relaxation. It had been four months since he had been able to find time for the walks that were so precious to him. "The fatigues of war," he wrote Abigail, "are much less destructive to health than the painful, laborious attention to debates and to writing, which drinks up the spirit and consumes the strength."[3]

There was much truth in John's statement. Robert Treat Paine was red-eyed and sallow, with a racking cough. Gerry, unaccustomed to a Philadelphia summer, had beaten a retreat. Adams himself, with his eyes inflamed, nerves unsteady and his brain "weak as water," suffered from "night sweats and feverous heats by day" and was about done in. Even Samuel Adams looked wan and exhausted—"between you and me . . . completely worn out," he wrote Warren. Samuel should have gone home for a rest six months ago, but he had run on nerve and will far past normal endurance.

By the middle of July, Adams was determined to resign. If the General Court would provide for relief every six months, he might, after a long rest, "be willing to take another trick or two," but only on some such condition would he consent to return to Philadelphia.[4]

"I must not point out to you, not even to you," he wrote Warren, "the causes of the losses, disgraces and misfortunes that befall you. I make the faces of my best friends a mile long if I do. What then shall I do? . . . Go home, and let two or three of you come here and fret yourselves, as long as I have done, until you shall acknowledge that I had reason? . . . We suffer inexpressibly for want of men of business—men acquainted with war by sea and land, men who have no pleasure but in business. You have them; send them along."[5] And again: "Let some others come here and see the beauties and sublimities of a Continental Congress. I will stay no longer." The General Court must send General Ward, since he had resigned his commission, and Dana, Warren himself, John Lowell, Palmer or Lincoln or Cushing. "Somebody you must send!"[6]

His proper sphere was the General Court where he could "see and hear and feel with my countrymen." He had left Abigail under a heavy load—to run the farm, manage the tenants, and educate the children. His own finances were in a dubious state. Of the little estate he had acquired by "an obstinate industry," five hundred pounds sterling was tied up in Boston real estate; four hundred more in bonds and in a library that was presently inaccessible to him; and another four hundred pounds in notes owed him—"not one farthing of the principal or interest of which I can obtain, and the signers are dying, breaking, flying every day."[7] In addition he had bought land that he could afford but interest and taxes upon it further impoverished him. Before the imposition of the Coercive Acts he had earned three hundred pounds a year or more; he estimated that espousing the cause of liberty had cost him some two thousand pounds sterling. The money granted him by the General Court as a delegate to Congress did not even defray his necessary expenses. If in the present state of things he could earn no fees as a lawyer, at least he might devote his energies to making the farm more profitable.

But these pleas for relief were unavailing. No word came releasing him from his durance. Gerry had left for Boston with the package of tea for Abigail and a few weeks later his cousin Samuel departed with a chaise and horse provided by the Great and General Court of Massachusetts. John, who missed his daily ride acutely, thought that he might at least have gotten a horse from the legislature. "I can live no longer without riding," he informed Abigail. "If Bass is willing to take one more ride with his old friend, let him come" and bring along a riding horse, so that John could get a little exercise.[8]

Saddled as he was with the duties of chairman of the Board of War (which often met at six o'clock in the morning to deliberate until Congress assembled; then after that body's rising might reconvene until six or seven in the evening and, not infrequently, far into the night), John thought of bringing Abigail to Philadelphia. If he could have her with him—"my best, my dearest, my wisest friend in this world"—he would gladly stay at his post indefinitely and be "proud and happy as a bridegroom."[9] He wrote her of his visit to a Baptist meeting the first week in August. The minister, he reported, was awkward and uncouth. His rantings prompted the reflection that "there is no one thing in which we of New England excel . . . more than in our university, our scholars and preachers." While there were a few gentlemen of Philadelphia who were the equal of the Bostonians in point of cultivation, "in general, old Massachusetts outshines her younger sisters." There was one area where

Philadelphia was clearly superior—in beneficent and learned societies, especially the American Philosophical Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge, a society "which excites scientific emulation and propagates their fame." This was exemplary and Adams vowed that if he survived "this scene of politics and war" he would see that "a philosophical society shall be established in Boston, if I have wit and address enough to accomplish it." For the time being, however, "instead of domestic felicity" and intellectual pursuits, he seemed "destined to public contentions. Instead of rural felicity, I must reconcile myself," he wrote, "to the smoke and noise of a city."

In Braintree, Abigail lived from letter to letter. Impatient of the mails, she pressed nine-year-old John Quincy into service as a postrider to bring letters from Boston to Braintree. Like a miniature Paul Revere, the youngster made the ride several times a week, his small, wiry figure bobbing along the coast road on the sorrel mare, his saddlebags invariably bearing a letter from his mother to his father. Once, upon returning from such an expedition, he produced one of the longed-for letters from his father with a flourish; then, intently watching his mother's face, another; and at last, giving a delighted laugh, he handed her a third—a windfall of letters.[10]

The draft had called up so many Braintree men that Abigail thought the women of the town must turn to and harvest the crops. "I believe I could gather corn and husk it," she wrote John, "but I should make a poor figure at digging potatoes." War had brought general demoralization; besides encouraging profiteering and speculation, it had carried off the teachers, and education in the town was almost wholly neglected. "The poorer sort of children" were left to "range the streets, without schools, without business, given up to all evil."[11]

Abigail wished only "for peace and tranquillity. All my desire and ambition," she wrote, "is to be esteemed and loved by my partner, to join with him in the education and instruction of our little ones, to sit under our own vines in peace, liberty and safety."[12]

As chairman of the Board of War, much of Adams' time and attention was taken up with superintending the assembling of a Continental force at New York of sufficient strength to repel the anticipated invasion by Howe's army. It was a tedious and disheartening task. The now familiar complaints poured in—money and medicine were in short supply, there had been inequities in promotion and the award of rank, discipline was poor, powder and flints were low; many of the soldiers were "sickly."

Adams followed Washington's disposition of his forces as closely as possible and questioned whether it was not a mistake to put such a large portion of the American army on Long Island, from which retreat was virtually impossible. But the query came too late. Even as it was being made, Howe was surprising Sullivan's division, scattering it, capturing the General and a large part of his force, and threatening to overwhelm the rest of the army pinned on Brooklyn Heights.

Washington just barely managed to extricate the remainder of his army; Glover's Marblehead Amphibions ferried them across the river in the dark of night. While General Howe prepared a combined land and sea operation against New York City, his brother, Admiral Howe, commander-in-chief of the British land and naval forces, dispatched the captured Sullivan to Philadelphia with peace feelers. "So," Adams wrote, "the fishers have set a seine, and a whole school . . . of fish have swum into it, and been caught." Then, to add insult to injury, one of the captured fishes was being sent to decoy the rest into captivity.

Howe, Adams wrote Warren, was "surrounded with disaffected American Machiavellians, exiles from Boston and elsewhere, who are instigating him to mingle art with force. He has sent Sullivan here . . . with the most insidious, though ridiculous message which you can conceive."[13] Most wounding of all to Adams was the rumor that the New England soldiers in considerable numbers had thrown down their arms and run. He wrote at once to Tudor, pleading for some more authoritative word. Had the Yankees indeed behaved with "infamous cowardice?" Was there "less courage in the Northern than in the Southern troops?" Rumor followed on rumor: the Continental Army had been destroyed, Washington was dead, the city of New York had been burned to the ground by the retreating Americans, it had been burned by Howe, and so on. Whatever their truth, John wrote to Abigail, it was clear that things were "too delicate and critical" to permit the *de facto* Secretary of War to leave the stage. "Panic may seize whom it will," he wrote. "It shall not seize me. I will stay here until the public countenance is much better, or much worse." It was "weak and unmanly" to give way to fears. "If the whole army had been cut to pieces it would have been shameful to have been so intimidated" as the citizens of Philadelphia seemed to be, he wrote Samuel Cooper, and he cautioned Abigail: "Lies by the million will be told you. Don't believe any of them."[14]

Adams comforted himself with the thought that even if Howe occupied New York he would be shut up in the city, afraid to divide his forces and unable to venture far into the countryside without being harassed by the militia, his foragers surrounded and their retreat cut off. It was possible that Providence had done better for the United Colonies than they could have done for themselves. Had the British been kept from Long Island, they would have struck somewhere else with perhaps more damage to the American cause. If they must be somewhere, Adams preferred to have them in that Tory nest, New York City.

In the bitterness of the Long Island defeat Tudor wrote of "the infamous desertions, the shameless ravages, and seditious speeches and mutinous behavior which prevail throughout the army." The existing articles of war were breeding "highwaymen and robbers" rather than forming soldiers. The militia were simply "an armed rabble . . . worse than nothing," for they spread disorder and insubordination among the regulars. They had better be kept at home where they might be depended on to defend their farms and families. The word was everywhere the same. Benjamin Hitchcock wrote imploringly, "For heaven's sake, for our country's sake and for liberty's sake, do let us have an established army!"[15]

Congress received the defeated Sullivan coolly and, after four days of debate over whether to take any notice of the message from Admiral Howe, appointed John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and Edward Rutledge to confer with the British commander at his headquarters on Staten Island (Adams and Franklin were chosen unanimously). The three were to go, not in their "private capacities," but as a committee representing "the free and independent states of America." To accept such a committee, Congress felt, would place Howe in the position of tacitly acknowledging American independence which he, presumably, had no power to do. The one clear advantage of such a conference was that it might delay the operations of Howe's army against New York and thus buy valuable time to try to put the Continental Army and its militia auxiliaries in somewhat better order to repel the British attack. Another hope was that the odium of continuing the war might be thrown up to Howe, and finally there was recurrent concern with winning over at least some of the Tories and the neutralists by giving every evidence of Congress' determination to bring about an honorable peace. John Adams saw in the enterprise only the twin specters of compromise and false hope. He thus opposed the mission "from first to last," and for his pains found himself a member of the committee. At first he was adamant in his refusal to serve but Hancock and Gerry joined with some of the "firmest men in Congress" to overcome his resistance; on Sunday, the ninth of September, he set off with his companions for Staten Island.

Despite his opposition to the mission, the journey itself was a welcome interlude to Adams. He enjoyed the company and the conversation of the doctor, and the fall countryside was a refreshment to a spirit cooped up for so many months in the hot and crowded city. Even the sharp and acidulous Rutledge, whom Adams had so often opposed in Congress, proved to be a genial traveling companion. By Tuesday night they had reached Brunswick in New Jersey and the next day they drove across the flats and salt marshes to Amboy. From Amboy they were ferried over to His Lordship's headquarters at Staten Island and there on September 11 the four men sat down to their negotiations. Howe was famous for his irresistible manner, graciousness and good humor; the beau ideal of the English aristocrat. He was also known to be a strong Whig and a friend of the colonial cause. The congressional emissaries had been cautioned against his persuasiveness and dangerous charm and he began to practice those gifts at once, expressing to Adams his deep feeling of friendship for Massachusetts Bay. John was not notably susceptible to charm and he observed at once to himself that the Admiral, for all his expressions of sympathy, seemed poorly informed on the actual issues that had led to colonial resistance.

He had requested the interview, Howe said, in order to discover for himself whether there was a possibility that the revolted colonies would return to their allegiance. He therefore could not receive or acknowledge the three men as members of Congress or as a committee of that body, but only as "private gentlemen." Moreover he had no authority to treat with Congress or with Americans in any character but that of British subjects. He could only grant pardons and advise and consult with Americans in regard to their complaints against the British government. The King and Parliament, he assured them, "were very favorably inclined toward redressing the grievances and reforming the administration of the American colonies." All the objectionable statutes of Parliament would be reconsidered and revised, and "if any errors had crept in, if they could be pointed out, they were very willing that they should be rectified." The Admiral was indeed all sweet reasonableness and accommodation, friendly, plausible, reassuring. If the colonies were sincere in their contention that they sought only the redress of particular grievances, not independence, why should they stand out against such a spirit of reconciliation?

General Sullivan, Rutledge replied, had indicated a rather more extensive temper of compromise. He had quoted His Lordship as saying that, for his own part, he would set the acts of Parliament completely aside, and that Parliament had no right to tax America, or meddle in her internal policy.

A flicker of annoyance showed on the Admiral's bland face. No, he had been misunderstood. General Sullivan had stretched his remarks somewhat beyond their original shape. He had labored long to persuade the ministers to give him authority to carry on discussions with those colonists who were in rebellion. He had gone so far as to state that he would not accept his command until he had full power to confer with any persons whom he should think proper. With such powers, it had been his intention to go to Philadelphia to confer with the members of Congress as private persons.

The committee was unanimous in its reaction to His Lordship's proposals. The fact was that in their view he had no real authority. He could confer and advise, to be sure, but he had nothing specific to offer. If the colonies were to submit they must do so on the basis of general assurances that Parliament would deign to regard their requests and petitions favorably. The hour for such amorphous discussions was past. Three or four months earlier, they undoubtedly would have hampered the radical effort to push through the resolve of independency; now they were harmless. The committee politely informed the Admiral that they had no authority to confer with him "or to treat or converse with him" except as members of Congress. Since he could not receive them in that character, their meeting was doomed to failure. "The declaration which had been made of independence was the result of long and cool deliberation," and "in obedience to the positive instructions of their constituents," accomplished with great reluctance, after every hope of reconciliation had been abandoned. Franklin, as spokesman of the committee, went so far as to assure His Lordship that since America would never again come under the domination of Great Britain it was the duty of every man of good will on both sides of the ocean who wished to promote peace to urge acceptance by Britain of American independence. Adams added that the Admiral could be sure that "America would never treat in any other character than as independent states." The colonies had gone through a "complete revolution" and had paid a high price for the transformation. The Americans were practical enough to know that the British government would never again have confidence in them or could govern them except by force of arms.[16] There was nothing more to be said. Howe expressed his regrets; the Americans bowed and withdrew.

The committee returned home, riding through the early fall morning, well satisfied with its mission. One more potentially divisive effort had been scotched; they had viewed the great Admiral, conversed with him in an easy and familiar manner, made clear to him the determination of America to maintain her independence, and come away, uncompromised, undaunted, unscathed.

Scarcely had their coach dwindled away across the flats, trailing a plume of dust, than the Admiral's brother, General Howe, put in motion his attack on New York City. The island of Manhattan, accessible to British warships and transports by the North and East rivers, was hardly defensible. After some hesitation Washington began to withdraw his forces up the island to Harlem Heights, the high ground to the north of the city. Even before the soldiers were on the march, the first waves of British assault troops landed, brushed aside the defenders, although Washington himself rushed forward to try to restore the line, and pushed inland. The main body of the Continental Army had to dash north to avoid being trapped by Howe's advancing troops.

Thus Adams and his two companions arrived in Philadelphia only a jump ahead of the news of another sharp defeat for Washington's forces. With the news came more depressing accounts of the inefficiency and demoralization of the American soldiers. The medical and hospital facilities had broken down and the sick and wounded were without care or medicine and often without food. Again, it was primarily the officers —"despicable animals," Tudor called them—who were most responsible for the poor performance of the men under their command. With such a spur, Congress at last bestirred itself and set about the task, so long delayed, of forming a regular army and a more rigorous set of articles of war. In this way, as Adams wrote Tudor, much good grows out of great evil. "A few disgraces and defeats have done more towards convincing the Congress than the rhetoric of many months, assisted by frequent letters from the General and many other officers of the army, was able to affect.

"The cowardice of New England men," Adams confessed, "has put my philosophy to the trial." Even supposing he had heard that his father, brother and son had fallen in the unhappy engagement, it would not have given him "so much grief as the shameful flight" of the New Englanders. The culpable officers should be shot. Indeed, if his best friend turned out to be among their number, he would not interpose to save him from the firing squad. Perhaps the old Roman practice of decimation of cowardly troops should be practiced—that is, the execution of every tenth soldier, chosen by lot, to encourage their brothers-in-arms to greater valor. But it was a consolation to recall that Hannibal had once spread such panic and disorder among the citizens of Rome without ever being able to follow up his advantage.

In a letter to Knox the same wound bled. "Pray tell me," he inquired, "does every man to the southward of Hudsons River behave like a hero, and every man to the northward of it like a poltroon, or not?" All the rumors from New York had it that the Northerners were "running away perpetually," while the Southern troops stood firm. If the New England men indeed were a pack of cowards, Adams would resign his place in Congress, "where I should not choose to represent poltroons, and remove to some Southern colony where I could enjoy the society of heroes, and have a chance of learning, sometime or other, to be part of a hero myself."[17]

In the aftermath of the Long Island and New York defeats, Adams' thoughts turned to the example of the Thebans who, reduced to slavery by the Spartans, were molded into a powerful army by Epaminondas. The Theban leader, like Washington, began with a mob of "raw recruits, new-raised citizens and husbandmen" whom by training and discipline he had made into a fighting force strong enough to defeat the greatest military power of the day. Epaminondas had toughened his men and given them courage and confidence by daily reconnoiters and skirmishes against the enemy, and Washington should do the same with his half-trained levies.[18]

One of the greatest shortcomings that Adams observed in the training of the Continental forces was the absence of daily, intensive close-order drill and exercises in the manual of arms. "Nothing inspires the men with military pride and ambition," he wrote Hitchcock, "like calling them together every day, and making them appear as well as they can. By living together, and moving in concert, they acquire a confidence in themselves and in each other. By being exposed to the inspection and observation of each other, they become ambitious of appearing as clean and neat as they can." The esprit thus created, as well as the physical conditioning of constant exercise and drill, helped to "preserve them against disease and prepare them for the rigors of an extended campaign."[19]

"The *unum necessarium* to our salvation," he informed Warren, was discipline in the army—that and strong and effective governments in the states. "There are so many persons among my worthy constituents who like liberty better than they understand it, that I expect to become unpopular by my preaching. But woe is me, if I preach it not. Woe will be to them if they do not hear."[20]

To General Parsons, whose brigade had been among those surprised by the enemy, Adams sent a pointed lesson on the importance of intelligence. The circumstances of the battle, which Adams had carefully reviewed, made clear to him that "our officers were not acquainted with the ground; that they had never reconnoitered the enemy; that they had neither spies, sentries nor guards placed as they ought to have been." Intelligence of the enemy was essential to the proper conduct of a battle and it must be constantly and systematically collected at all levels, and just as constantly evaluated by the higher commanders. The Romans would not have put up with such ineptness. "Ancient generals," he noted a little ominously, "have been nailed to gibbets alive for such crimes."

Again, he took heart from Montesquieu's analysis of Hannibal's failure against Rome. Hannibal was irresistible until he began to garrison the towns and cities that he had captured. Then his scattered and isolated army, having lost its unity and its fighting edge, was defeated piecemeal by the Romans. "Thus you see," he added, "I scribble my opinions with great assurance, upon subjects which I understand not." It might seem presumptuous of a civilian to offer advice to soldiers, but it seemed that someone must assume the role of preceptor, for the army was plainly "a scene of indiscipline, insubordination and confusion." "Courage and reading were all that were necessary to the formation of an officer," he wrote Parsons. Officers, like lawyers, must read. "I will add without vanity," he declared, "I have read as much on the military art and much more of the history of war than any American officer of that army, General Lee excepted."[21] Needless to say, such letters were too true to endear him to the officers who read them.

The new articles of war, many of whose revisions had been suggested by William Tudor, were debated and approved on the twentieth of September. An Adams-inspired addition "earnestly recommended to all officers and soldiers diligently to attend divine service"; another imposed on any noncommissioned officer or soldier who used "any profane oath or execration" a fine of one sixth of a dollar "to be applied to the use of the sick soldiers of the troop or company to which the offender belongs."

A further Adams project to improve the quality of the American officers was a military academy to give a thorough training in the science of war. He proposed it to Congress and, upon being appointed to a committee to consider the suggestion, wrote at once to some of his officer correspondents to get their plans for such an institution.[22] Here was still another way to create a professional army.

Two days later the plan of a treaty with France which Adams had drafted months earlier was supplemented by instructions which relaxed some of its original provisions and added such others as the instruction to "solicit the court of France for an immediate supply of twenty or thirty thousand muskets and bayonets, and a large supply of ammunition and brass field pieces, to be sent under convoy by France," and to recruit "a few good engineers in the service of the United States." The as yet undesignated emissaries were also instructed to hint broadly to the French court that an American "re-union with Great Britain may be the consequence of a delay" in providing the needed war material. Perhaps most important of all, the emissaries were to try to obtain, "as early as possible, a public acknowledgment of the independency of these states."

On Thursday, September 26, Congress elected Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane and Thomas Jefferson commissioners to the court of France. Deane was already abroad. Jefferson, absent in Virginia, declined to serve, and Arthur Lee, also in France, was appointed to replace him. With this act, Congress launched its bark on the roiled waters of international diplomacy. No one knew when or even whether France would dare to receive the commissioners at all. To do so would be defying Britain openly and bringing on immediate war. Silas Deane, acting as the secret agent of Congress, was already obtaining supplies through a dummy trading company, and this might well be as far as France wished to go. But whatever the success of the mission, the new United States had taken another step to support its claim of sovereignty as a nation.

A week after the commissioners had been appointed, a committee which had been sent to inspect the condition of the army brought back its report. The picture that it painted was dismal indeed. Sickness, poor discipline and desertion were endemic. Out of an army of 25,375 only 16,905 were fit for duty, "the residue sick or absent." At least 15,000 additional soldiers were needed to reinforce Washington's army at Harlem Heights. Officers took the lead in "plunder and other disorders" and refused even to attempt to discipline the soldiers under their commands. The commissary of military stores was in urgent need of ten tons of musket and rifle powder, twenty tons of buckshot and two hundred thousand flints.

To encourage able gentlemen to accept commissions as officers, Congress reluctantly raised their pay: under the new schedule a colonel was to receive seventy-five dollars a month and a lieutenant twenty-seven. For enlisted men and noncommissioned officers who would sign for the duration of the war, Congress provided that "a suit of clothes be annually given . . . to consist . . . of two linen hunting shirts, two pairs of overalls, a leather or woolen waistcoat with sleeves, one pair of breeches, a hat or leather cap, two shirts, two pair of hose and two shoes, amounting, in the whole, to the value of twenty dollars. . . ." The next day Congress proceeded to consider the various reforms proposed by "the committee who went to the camp." The mood of this group was suggested by a paragraph in their report recommending "that a disciplinarian with . . . the rank of Major General be appointed . . . whose duty it shall be constantly to discipline the corps of officers of each brigade. . . ." Although this provision was deleted it indicated how serious the leadership problem was in the Continental Army.

The increased load of work, the performance of the New England troops and the strain of his long absence from Abigail and the children combined to keep Adams strained and weary. He was often up at four or five in the morning and usually kept constantly occupied until ten at night, when he would drop exhausted into bed. For such a weak, ailing, enfeebled fellow as he insisted he was, he showed remarkable stamina. While healthier, less hard-pressed delegates left for home and rest, quite worn out, Adams persevered. "I will not say that I expect to run distracted, to grow melancholy, to drop in an apoplexy, or fall into a consumption," he wrote Abigail, "but I do say, it is little less than a miracle that one or other of these misfortunes has not befallen me before now."[23]

Abigail, for her part, suffered acutely from his continued absence and hoped daily for news of his return. She was uneasy about his health, worried at hearing so infrequently from him (sometimes several weeks passed without word) and alarmed at the news of Howe's occupation of New York. Perhaps John would be cut off, unable to make his way back to Massachusetts. Anxious and lonely, unable to sleep well at night, she fell into one of her moods of depression, finding no pleasure in the children, in company or even in books. Everything required a disportionate effort and her only solace was to write her husband, who seemed so much farther away now that a British army lay between them; it was only in this comforting and familiar act that she found composure of mind. Then distance could be annihilated; she saw him in her mind's eye, heard his voice, almost felt his reassuring presence. The letters were her salvation, those she wrote as well as those she received. Gloomy and apprehensive as she was, she could not forbear to tease John, who, having warned her solemnly to follow his example in not signing her letters, gave himself away by placing his congressional frank on the envelope.

In October, with Washington's army apparently securely entrenched at Harlem Heights, and Howe, made cautious by a sharp if minor defeat and doubtless remembering the debacle at Breed's Hill, remaining in the city, Adams applied for and received a leave of absence from Congress. "I suppose your ladyship has been in the twitters for some time past," he wrote Abigail, "because you have not received a letter by every post, as you used to do. But I am coming to make my apology in person."[24]

On the thirteenth of October, Adams set out with Bass for Braintree. Riding out of the city in the clear and pungent air of autumn, Adams felt the cares of the world slip from his shoulders. These journeys over now familiar roads and past friendly taverns refreshed his spirits and improved his health. He and Bass jogged through the Liberties, oated their horses at the Red Lion and had lunch at Bristol. They crossed the Delaware at the Trenton Ferry in the full, warm sun of midafternoon and put up for the night on the Jersey side "partly to avoid riding in the evening air, and partly because . . . my tendons are delicate." They had ridden a respectable thirty miles; allowing for the New York detour, two more weeks should see them in Boston.

XXII

It was almost a year since Adams had been in Braintree. In the interval the family had passed through the fires of smallpox and all of them bore a few pits to testify to their hard-earned immunity. The children had grown like weeds, and Johnny, seasoned postrider that he was, tempered his natural gaiety and high spirits with an occasional pose of adult gravity. The farm had flourished as always under Abigail's management, despite the high wages and poor performance of hired hands. It was obvious from the children's round, ruddy faces that they had suffered no deprivation from the war. John, fussed over and catered to by Abigail, was soon immersed in the work that he so loved. However carefully a farm has been maintained there always remain a thousand tasks to be done—a ditch, a wall, a new field to be cleared, frost-heaved stones from the past winter to be pried out of the clover field, the pasture spring to be cleared, things to be mended, painted and moved, or the endless manuring process which made the difference between a rich and a barren farm. There was salt hay to be hauled from the tidal flats, and seaweed uprooted by fall storms and strewn along the shores and inlets to be gathered up for fertilizer and brought by oxcarts to the Adams farms; tenants had to be dealt with firmly or gently according to their nature and worth. The house as well was in need of a man's experienced hand—a stair tread split, a clapboard sprung, a fireplace brick loose. It was a joy to be home from the wars. Even though the battles he had fought in and the campaigns he had won were political rather than military, he was hero enough for his family and for Braintree.

In addition to the restorative work, there was the conversation with Abigail and time to read; the greatest of luxuries was to be among his books, which stretched to the ceiling of the little room that served as a combination office and library and overflowed into the sitting room and even into the kitchen. It was fortunate that all six of the Adamses were small of stature, for they fit into the little house like pieces of a Chinese puzzle, snug and warm to be sure, but practically elbow to elbow.

The apple harvest, large and sweet and numerous, had been pressed into cider, except those put by in the cold house to eat and those dried for apple pies. The cider was in barrels stacked in the barn; one barrel was always in the corner of the kitchen.

John and Abigail did much visiting: to his mother, spry and talkative; to the Reverend Mr. Smith's at Weymouth; to Parson Wibird's; to the Warrens' at Plymouth; to "dear Brother Cranch's" to see his latest tinkerings and experiments; to the Quincys' to give what information he could of the proceedings of Congress, the state of the army and the hopes for French aid. There were masculine gatherings at Thayer's tavern and at Bracket's where Adams was something of an oracle, a great man in the councils of the nation.

Moreover, there were all the Boston friends and connections to see and the political temper of the state to be carefully assayed. John conferred with Dana and Lowell, Warren and Lovell, Pickering and the rest of the delegates to the General Court who were of a mind with him about the proper prescription of government. So the hours were filled with family, farm, books, friends and politics and so filled passed much too quickly. Even news from the army of a succession of defeats and hasty withdrawals from untenable positions could not entirely dampen Adams' spirits.

Throughout October, Washington and his dwindling army tried to elude their pursuer and only Howe's inclination to dawdle saved them from being exterminated by the splendidly equipped, well-led British soldiers and their Hessian auxiliaries. Fort Washington was captured with two thousand American soldiers and, what was probably more crucial, a good portion of the army's meager stores of cannon, powder and shot. General Greene barely escaped from Fort Lee, abandoning most of his supplies; Washington, trying desperately to avoid encirclement, joined Greene in Hackensack and slipped across the Delaware just as Cornwallis' advance guard came up. Adams' favorite, the eccentric and learned General Lee, first ignored Washington's orders to move south; then, at last moving on at a leisurely pace, was captured in his dressing gown by a British patrol.

Most humiliating of all, Congress, alarmed at the approach of Cornwallis, fled precipitately from Philadelphia to Baltimore, a "dirty, boggy hole" ninety miles farther from Boston, leaving Washington with his wretched remnant of an army to defend what was left of the cause of liberty. Half starved, chilblained and numb with cold, the soldiers huddled south of the river, many of them waiting for the expiration of their enlistments in a few weeks to creep home. Patriot hearts grew faint and weary. It suddenly seemed folly to have opposed the finest professional soldiers and the richest nation in the world with a few thousand half-trained civilian levies.

Howe, pleased with a successful campaign, retired to New York to enjoy the Tory ladies and gentlemen of that city, garrisoning the Jerseys at Trenton, Brunswick, Bordentown, Amboy and Princeton. Washington, observing the scattered forces, ferried his tattered legions across the Delaware under the cover of darkness and captured the sleepy Hessian garrison. After carrying his prisoners to the Pennsylvania side, he crossed the river again and made his camp near Trenton. Howe, reacting with surprising speed, sent Cornwallis and the New Brunswick garrison to finish Washington off. The armies bivouacked in sight of each other, and in the middle of the night Washington, leaving his campfires burning, slipped around Cornwallis' flank and headed for Princeton. On the road he encountered reinforcements coming up to join Cornwallis and drove them back toward Brunswick with heavy losses. He then disengaged his weary forces, withdrew to Morristown and established winter quarters there, having by two brilliant maneuvers put new heart into patriots everywhere.

In Boston, far from the scene of action, Adams could only wait impatiently for news which was weeks late and extremely scanty when it arrived. At last the essentials of the story were clear, and the Adams family exulted with their neighbors. John predicted the battles would mark the turning point of the war. Minor as the victories were, they were the more treasured for their rarity. In the eighteen long months from Bunker Hill to Trenton, Americans had had little enough in the military line to cheer about. They needed Trenton and Princeton as a starving man needs nourishment. At last Congress had an army. American soldiers had proved more than a match for foreign mercenaries and veteran redcoats; they had begun to fight, and in this beginning it was possible at last to envision the end, far off as that might be.

From Morristown word came, via William Tudor, that soldiers were going off unpaid rather than remain in the bleak winter encampment, but a letter from General Sullivan at least reassured John on one point. At Princeton and Trenton Yankee "cowardice assumed the shape of true valor . . . and Southern valor appeared to be a composition of boasting and conceit." Washington himself had declared that the New Englanders were the backbone of his army. "Believe me, sir," Sullivan added, "the Yankees took Trenton before the other troops knew anything of the matter. . . . Assure your friends that no men fight better or write worse than the Yankees." Properly led, they were the equal or superior of any other Continental soldiers.[1]

Samuel Adams wrote to John from Baltimore, urging him to return and giving him what news he dared trust to the mails. Away from the distractions of life in Philadelphia, Congress had done a prodigious amount of work. General Lee had been its special pet and Congress had directed Washington to offer six Hessian field officers in exchange for the dilatory general. At long last the delegates had undertaken to establish boards of war, ordnance, navy, and treasury, with a chamber of commerce—each of them to consist of gentlemen who were not members of Congress. "By these means," Samuel hoped, "our business will be done more systematically, speedily and effectually."[2]

Soon after the beginning of the new year Adams set off with his servant, John Turner, for Baltimore. Somehow the parting seemed harder than ever. He and Abigail were determined to appear composed for the children's sake but it was a severe testing. From Dedham, where he stayed the night with the Spragues, he wrote Abigail, "My good genius, my guardian angel, whispers to me that we shall see happier days, and that I shall live to enjoy the felicities of domestic life with her whom my heart esteems above all earthly blessings."[3]

The ride was so beset by storms and bad weather that the two travelers spent ten days on the road from Braintree to New York. The detour around the British-occupied city took them north along the Hudson to Poughkeepsie, where Adams, passing through the lower Catskills, felt like Hannibal marching over the Alps. His little colt, undaunted by the severe cold and snowy roads, clambered bravely on and Adams, stimulated by the exercise and the frosty, rugged beauty of the terrain—"a grand sight, a range of vast mountains which seem to be rolling like the tumbling sea"—was in excellent spirits. At Poughkeepsie they found the ice thick enough to bear their horses' weight and, crossing to the western side of the river, they found a free and open road to Pennsylvania.

Making their way through New Jersey, they visited the Moravian mill, a structure four stories high, built of limestone by the Moravians of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Large quantities of grain of all kinds were stored there and ground to flour by the enterprising German settlers. At Easton, in the Quaker state, they found Dutch Calvinists and Lutherans sharing a handsome stone church—an encouraging sign, to Adams, of the new spirit of tolerance and co-operation among Protestant Christians.

John was fascinated by Bethlehem itself, the "curious and remarkable" Moravian community. The Moravians kept a public house which was the cleanest and best run he had ever seen, maintained beautiful public gardens, and had "carried the mechanical arts to greater perfection" than anywhere else he knew of. He was especially impressed by their ingenious water pump, which carried water to every part of the town. The communal mills lay along the Lehigh River—"the best grist mills and bolting mills that are anywhere to be found; the best fulling mills, an oil mill, a mill to grind bark for the tanyard, a dyeing house where all colors are dyed, machines for shearing cloth, etc."

The town was divided into three choirs—young men, young women and widows, each quartered in a separate building and each pursuing various trades under supervision. The church, with a fine organ, was hung with pictures of Christ from birth to ascension, painted "with very strong colors and very violent passions, but not in a very elegant taste. . . . Christian love is their professed object," he noted, adding a little unkindly, "but it is said they love money and make their public institutions subservient to the gratification of that passion." He also observed with approval that they were "very liberal and candid in all their notions in opposition to bigotry, and live in charity with all denominations."[4]

At Havre de Grace, Adams and Turner were ferried across the Susquehanna and as they rode on their last lap through the Maryland countryside Adams was delighted with the neat, prosperous farms, large flocks of sheep in the pastures and men and women dressing flax in the barnyard.

On Saturday, the first of February, the two men arrived at last in Baltimore, a city built like Rome on seven hills. They had passed through weather "sometimes bitterly cold, sometimes warm, sometimes rainy, sometimes snowy, and the roads abominably hard and rough." Altogether, it was "the longest journey and through the worst roads and the worst weather" that John had ever experienced.[5]

Adams found Baltimore, despite its unpaved, muddy, refuse-littered streets, a "very pretty town, situated on the Patapsco, which empties itself into the great bay of the Chesapeake." He was pleased to note that it was full of good Whigs. "I think I have never been better pleased," he added, "with any of our American states than with Maryland."

Coming back to Congress, Adams had somewhat the sensations of a veteran soldier joining his regiment after leave. There was a kind of exhilaration in joining his friends and taking up once again the pressing problems of a nation at war. Although Adams found Congress "very well united and much more spirited than ever," he was dismayed at "the melancholy prospect before me of a Congress continually changing, until very few faces remain that I saw in the first Congress." There were none from the Carolinas, only one from Virginia, two from Maryland, none from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, New Hampshire, and only one from Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Samuel Adams, Roger Sherman, Richard Henry Lee, Samuel Chase and William Paca were the only ones left. "The rest," he wrote, "are dead, resigned, deserted or cut up into Governors, etc., at home." On the other hand, some of the new men were first rate. Dr. Witherspoon was one of the ablest members and Pennsylvania had sent a delegation of men "as firm as a rock,"[6] among them Dr. Benjamin Rush, whom John had once characterized as "an elegant, ingenuous body, a sprightly, pretty fellow . . . too much of a talker to be a deep thinker," but whom he had come increasingly to like and admire. Gerry was back, "a man of immense worth. If every man here was a Gerry, the liberties of America would be safe against the gates of earth and hell"; John thoroughly enjoyed the eccentric little Bostonian.

A few days after his arrival in Baltimore he dined with Dr. Witherspoon, Samuel Adams, James Lovell and Benjamin Harrison at the princely estate of Mr. William Lux, a Maryland squire; then he lunched the following day at Hancock's on good New England salt fish. There John heard the slyly circulated rumor that Hancock was determined to return to Boston in April in order to make himself available for the office of Governor of Massachusetts. Adams was quite ready to credit the rumor, noting in his diary, "What aspiring little creatures we are! How subtle, sagacious and judicious this passion is! How clearly it sees it object, how constantly it pursues it, and what wise plans it devises for obtaining it!"[7]

Lodgings, he found, were exorbitant. Wood was twenty dollars a cord, and he was charged three pounds a week for board: "breakfast, dinner, and bed, without one drop of liquor or one spark of light or fire." In addition it cost a guinea per week to board a horse, almost as much as for a man. At least his quarters were convenient; they were just down the street from the converted tavern in which Congress was sitting.[8]

On Sunday, John went to a Presbyterian meeting; since Monday had been appointed a fast day by Congress, he went again and heard the Reverend Mr. Allison "deliver a most pathetic and animating as well as pious, patriotic and elegant discourse." The Presbyterian meetinghouse was on the highest of the seven hills, "the Beacon Hill of Baltimore," and from this height a beautiful vista of streams and rich meadows spread out from the city as far as the eye could see. He wrote Abigail of his plans to investigate the Baltimoreans' "religion, their laws, their customs, their manners, their descent and education, their learning, their schools, their colleges and their morals."

The leading men of Maryland were mostly planters and farmers. The planters raised tobacco and the farmers principally wheat. The cultivation of the land and the minor trades were performed by Negro slaves which enabled the farmers as well as the planters to strut about like gentlemen. "They hold their Negroes and convicts, that is, all laboring people and tradesmen, in such contempt," Adams wrote, "that they think themselves a distinct order of beings." It followed that they would not allow their sons to work or to learn any trade, "but they bring them up in idleness or, what is worse, in horse racing, cockfighting, and card playing." He found men of property preoccupied with making money; they were "land jobbers, speculators in land; little generosity to the public, little public spirit."[9]

Soon after his return to Congress Adams was involved in the problem of Continental finances. A faction of New Englanders who were working for the regulation of prices sought his support but Adams doubted the efficacy of such legislation. At best, it would bring "only a partial and temporary relief." He predicted that "after a time the evils will break out with greater violence." In his view the only real cure would be to stop the reckless emissions of paper money, call in some that was already out, and "devise means effectually to support the credit of the rest." "To this end," he wrote Abigail, "we must begin forthwith to tax the people as largely as the distressed circumstances will bear."

Another important source of money should come from the sale of government securities but to sell these the interest rate must be raised from four per cent to a more realistic six per cent. You could not sell bonds by exhortation alone. Investors must have a reasonable return.[10]

When the issue of interest on the loan certificates or bonds came up in Congress, Adams did his best to prevail upon the delegates to raise the interest rate to six per cent, which was nearer what "the use of the money is honestly worth in the ordinary course of business"; after two days of debate the question was lost by an equal division of the states. Rhode Island, Connecticut, the Carolinas and Georgia opposed Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Virginia and New Jersey. This, Adams wrote Warren, was an example of the inequity of voting by states. On an issue of first importance nine delegates, representing about eight hundred thousand people, had forestalled eighteen delegates, representing a million and a half. "I tremble for the consequences of this determination," Adams added. "If the loan officers should not procure us money, we must emit more, which will depreciate all which is already abroad, and so raise the prices of provisions and the necessaries of life that the additional expense . . . for supplying their army and navy will be vastly more than the two per cent in dispute." It was always too little and too late; the same story over and over. Congress was unwilling to impose adequate taxes, unwilling to pay decent wages to soldiers and officers, unwilling to offer a substantial bounty for enlistment, unwilling to provide a pension for disabled soldiers; in consequence their finances were in complete disorder and they had only half an army, unpaid and poorly trained. The result was that, eventually and with bad grace, the delegates were forced to make up for their niggardliness at vastly greater expense. It would be the same with the loan certificates. When they found that they could not get money for four per cent, they would doubtless, in desperation, and with money becoming increasingly scarce, have to raise the rate to eight per cent. It was Adams' devout wish that the moneyed men of Massachusetts would subscribe money freely. "They will repent of it if they do not," he wrote. "We shall be compelled to emit such quantities that every man except a few villains will lose more by depreciation than the two per cent. Not to mention the scene of anarchy and horror that a continuation of emissions will infallibly bring upon us. . . . A depreciating currency we must not have, it will ruin us. The medium of trade ought to be as unchangeable as truth, as immutable as morality. The least variation in its value does injustice to multitudes, and in proportion it injures the morals of the people, a point of the last importance in a republican government."

As the delegate of a commercial state, Adams had given much thought to the problem of raising money by loan—who the likely lenders would be: men who lived on income, rich merchants with a surplus from their trading operations, widows, orphans whose guardians invested for them, "a few divines, lawyers and physicians who are able to lay by a little of their annual earnings," here and there a frugal farmer or tradesman, and finally schools, colleges, towns, parishes "and other societies which sometimes lend money." All these potential lenders must be assured of a reasonable return.[11]

"I have got into the old routine of War Office and Congress," he wrote Abigail, "which takes up my time in such a manner that I can scarce write a line. I have not time to think nor to speak." But again he stood up surprisingly well. His eyes, which tired quickly, were often sore and inflamed and he grew increasingly nearsighted. "I believe," he confided to Abigail, "I must assume the appearance of wisdom, age and gravity and put on spectacles to walk about the street." He decided to resign as Chief Justice of Massachusetts. The state courts were in confusion; he had never actually served as head of the supreme judiciary and he considered himself too feeble to do so. His constitution was so delicate that, as he put it, "I can but just keep myself alive, and in tolerable spirits."[12]

By the middle of February Congress was fed up with its temporary home. It was ashamed of its hasty and unnecessary flight and eager to return to the fleshpots of Philadelphia. After some bitter wrangling the delegates voted to adjourn and reconvene a week hence in the Quaker City. John sent a barrel of flour to Abigail and a "perpetual almanac" to John Quincy and set out north over the muddy roads.

Philadelphia was a different city from the one that Congress had so hastily abandoned. More than half the inhabitants had taken flight at the same time that Congress decamped for Baltimore. "The remainder," Adams wrote Abigail, "are chiefly Quakers, as dull as beetles. From these neither good is to be expected nor evil to be apprehended. They are a kind of neutral tribe, or the race of the insipids." There were rumors that Howe was determined to try to capture Philadelphia. But Adams was confident that it would do the British no more good than New York, if, indeed, as much.[13] He spent precious time searching for accommodations for himself, his servant and his horses. The expense of the most modest lodgings was ruinous. He had no money to send Abigail and he worried constantly about how she would make ends meet.

Adams' new quarters were on Walnut Street, between Second and Third, in the house of a transplanted Bostonian, but he was frequently a visitor at the more colorful lodgings of his cousin on Fourth Street, near Market. Mrs. Cheesman, Sam's landlady, had had four husbands—one tailor, two shoemakers, and most recently the famous evangelist, Gilbert Tennant—and now she was "still ready for a fifth, and well deserves him too," John wrote Abigail. This stout, cheerful lady contributed much to the lively, often hilarious atmosphere of the Cheesman house. Another of her boarders was Roger Sherman, the "old Puritan, as honest as an angel and as firm in the cause of American independence as Mount Atlas"; and a third, Colonel Thornton, "as droll and funny as Tristam Shandy."[14] It made a congenial company that helped John forget his loneliness for a time.

Among the special pleasures of the return to Philadelphia were the daily ministrations of Burne, the Cockney barber. However weary or depressed Adams was, Burne invariably raised his spirits. The whole operation was a pleasant one. The barber, with his cheerful, puckish face, conducted it like a minor ceremony: the clean white towel, the lather, the rythmical stropping of the razor, the slow, careful shaving, the hot towels, and as an accompaniment his rattling Cockney voice going on and on about the latest rumor or the newest absurdity; about his troubles with his wife, the duplicity of the Tories, the depravity of the British. John, of course, egged him on by asking his opinion or giving him pieces of news likely to whet his wit. "Have you heard, Mr. Burne," he asked him one morning, "of the success of the *Rattlesnake* . . . and the *Sturdy Beggar* . . . ? These two privateers have taken eleven prizes, and sent them to the West India Islands."

"Confound the ill luck, sir; I was going to sea myself on board the *Rattlesnake*, and my wife fell a-yelping. These wives are queer things. I told her I wondered she had no more ambition. 'Now,' says I, 'when you walk the streets and anybody asks who that is, the answer is, "*Burne the barber's wife.*" Should you not be better pleased to hear it said, "*That is Captain Burne's lady*, the captain of marines on board the *Rattlesnake*"?' 'Oh,' says she, 'I would rather be called Burne the barber's wife, than Captain Burne's widow. I don't desire to live better than you maintain me, my dear.'

"So it is, sir," Burne continued, grinning from one large ear to the other, "by this sweet, honey language, I am chouzed out of my prizes, and must go on with my soap and razors and pincers and combs. I wish she had my ambition."[15]

With Oliver Whipple, Adams went to Mrs. Wells's waxworks. In one room the return of the prodigal son was depicted. The son, on his knees, sought his father's forgiveness. On the father's waxen countenance "joy and grief and compassion" were vividly expressed, while the brother who had minded his manners and business looked glumly on. In another room were figures of Pitt, Franklin, the English historian, Mrs. Macaulay, and a miser counting his money. Adams was not entirely won by the display. "The imitation of life was too faint," he wrote Abigail, "and I seemed to be walking among a group of corpses, standing, sitting, and walking, laughing, singing, crying, and weeping. This art, I think, will make but little progress in the world." He much preferred Dr. Chovet's wax corpse with the various parts of the body modeled for the benefit of anatomy students. "Wax is much fitter to represent dead bodies than living ones."[16]

The Reverend William Gordon was an English minister and friend of liberty who, having established himself in America, decided to become the Thucydides of the Americans' struggle for independence. He had set about "collecting materials for a history of the rise, progress and successful issue of the American Revolution," and he wrote Adams asking him to provide information about the development of the conflict. General Washington had promised to assist him with information, and he trusted that Adams, commended to him as "the clearest head and firmest heart of any man in the Congress," would be equally co-operative.[17] Adams replied that susceptible as he was to such "wild praises . . . no such attributes belong to me." But he would be glad to give what assistance he could. He was, of course, convinced that America would make good its claim to independence after many travails. But there was one enemy more dangerous than famine, pestilence or sword. "I mean," he wrote, "the corruption which is prevalent in so many American hearts, a depravity that is more inconsistent with our republican governments than light is with darkness. If we can once give energy enough to our governments, and discipline enough to our armies, to overcome this base principle of selfishness, to make citizens and soldiers feel themselves the children of the commonwealth, and love and revere their mother so much as to make their happiness consist in her service, I think we shall have a prospect of triumph indeed."[18]

"The spring advances very rapidly," he reported to Abigail soon after his arrival in Philadelphia, "and all nature will soon be clothed in her gayest robes." The tender shoots of grass which thrust their way through the damp earth turned his "longing imagination," as he put it, to "my little farm and its dear inhabitants." He wished to be back at Braintree "to wander in my meadows, to ramble over my mountains, and to sit . . . with her who has all my heart, by the side of the brooks. . . . I begin to suspect that I have not much of the grand in my composition. The pride and pomp of war, the continual sound of drums and fifes . . . the prancings and tramplings of the Light Horse . . . have no charms for me. I long for rural and domestic scenes, for the warbling of birds and prattle of my children." He felt more poetical than political. "I should prefer the delights of a garden to the dominion of a world. I have nothing of Caesar's greatness in my soul. Power has not my wishes in her train." The gods, by granting him "health and peace and competence," the society of his family and friends, the leisurely reading of his books, and the enjoyment of his farm and garden, would make him as happy as he had any wish to be. "Of that ambition which has power for its object," he declared, "I don't believe I have a spark in my heart. There are other kinds of ambition," he added, "of which I have a great deal." Here again was the patriot of Roman austerity, the American Cincinnatus. That the picture thus sketched was not entirely true to life Adams confessed when he reread the preserved copy in his letterbook several weeks later. Beside the reference to "other kinds of ambition" he noted "literary and professional, I suppose"; and then added "But is not the heart deceitful above all things?" He knew he was no more immune to the attractions of power than the next man, however much at a particular moment he might allow himself to be carried away by the ideal of ancient virtue.[19]

Adams' feelings were constantly exacerbated by the news from New England. Massachusetts lagged far behind in filling up its levy for the Continental Army and a cloud continued to hang over the Yankee soldiers and their officers as a result of the defeats at Long Island and New York. In Boston the recruiting of soldiers went very slowly. "The lassitude and torpor that has seized New England," Adams remarked, "is to me very surprising." The Tories plucked up the courage to grumble and even declared openly that the American cause was lost.[20] It was more than he could bear amidst his other burdens to hear constant aspersions on the New Englanders—"that they are all dead, all turned Tories, that they are small beer, which froths and foams for a few moments . . . and then flattens down to worse than water." This he simply would not endure.[21]

"With the noblest prize in view that ever mortals contended for," he wrote Abigail, "and with the fairest prospects of obtaining it upon easy terms, the people of Massachusetts Bay are dead. . . . Do they wish to see another crippled, disastrous and disgraceful campaign for want of an army? I am more sick and more ashamed of my own countrymen than ever I was before. The spleen, the vapors, the dismals, the horrors seem to have seized our whole state. More wrath than terror has seized me. I am very mad." He had a bad cold which added to his moroseness—"I . . . mope about and drudge, as usual, like a galley slave," he wrote Abigail. It was especially hard with the coming of spring to be so far from home, laboring "day after day and month after month in a conclave where neither taste, nor fancy, nor reason, nor passion, nor appetite can be gratified." Then would come the historical pose once more: "Posterity! you will never know how much it cost the present generation to preserve your freedom! I hope you will make good use of it. If you do not, I shall repent it in heaven that I ever took half the pains to preserve it."[22]

Adams was free to criticize his home state, sometimes bitterly, but let anyone else say a word against it and he was its most determined champion. To Tudor's complaints that Massachusetts motives were being impugned Adams replied hotly. "These peevishnesses I have been a witness to a long time," he wrote. "It is envy at bottom. They see the superiority of the Massachusetts to every one of them, in every point of view, and it frets them; but it will fret away. . . . I hate disputes of this sort, and I never begin them; but when Massachusetts is attacked, I never have and never will fail to defend her as far as truth and justice will warrant me, and no further."[23]

Adams was also annoyed at the susceptibility of the capital city to rumors and alarms which kept it in a constant state of agitation. The story spread everywhere that the British ministry had rented two hundred thousand bloodthirsty Russian soldiers to lay waste the colonies from New Hampshire to Georgia and there were persistent reports that the Howes were headed for Philadelphia to seize the city.

In his analysis of Howe's plan of campaign, Adams made a shrewder estimate of British capacities than the Continental staff officers. He had no fear of an immediate attack on Philadelphia. The British were reported to be only ten thousand strong and they would need reinforcements before they would dare to march by land. In fact only a land-sea operation could succeed and at the moment the British fleet was inadequate for such an undertaking. If reinforcements of ships and men arrived by midsummer, the British might indeed have the strength to seize Philadelphia, but the city would do them little good. They would not be able to maintain garrisons of sufficient size between it and New York to keep communications open and thus they would have two isolated commands—at New York and Philadelphia—rather than one. But they would be no nearer subduing the United States. "The acquisition of Philadelphia would give Howe a temporary *éclat*, it is true, in Europe and America," he wrote Tudor, "but it would in the end prove his destruction."[24]

Adams felt a constant frustration over the affairs of the Board of War. He was like a man groping in the dark. Moreover, as he wrote peevishly to Nathanael Greene, his views were given little credit. He was left uninformed by the army and his counsels were ignored in Congress. Greene wrote back rebuking him. He was informed as soon as possible of the movements of the enemy and of the state of the Continental forces. His opinions had as great a weight in Congress and elsewhere as those of any man in America. If, as Adams suggested in his letter, personal ambition "and not the common good of mankind" was the guiding motive in Congress, he would resign his commission and become a farmer.[25] Joseph Ward, Adams' friend and protégé, wrote to recommend waiting as the safest strategy. Americans needed only to breed, to multiply, and they would in time overwhelm the British. It was far better to make one man than to kill two. "If we were lost, I mean should we by excessive heroism lose ourselves," Ward reflected, "where would America find seed for the next crop of heroes?"[26]

In reply to Greene's rebuke, Adams admitted that Congress unquestionably had the authority to direct military operations but it would be most unwise to exercise it. "There is not a man in Congress who knows what force you now have in New Jersey," he wrote. "We have had no returns [for] a long time and the opinions of gentlemen who come from camp are very various." He had given his best efforts to building up the army, and in his view there was nothing more to be done except to hire German, Swiss or French mercenaries. The deaths by sickness and by battle were a terrible drain on a country without a surplus population. "The waste of the natives of the country in the army is a melancholy and an alarming consideration. We want people for agriculture, manufactures, commerce and war, both by sea and land."[27]

The New Englanders wished to have General Gates placed in command of the Northern department but the New Yorkers had prevailed and General Schuyler, a native of that state, was given the command. The principal force under his direction was that commanded by General Arthur St. Clair at Fort Ticonderoga. "Ti" was a vital post because it protected New England from British invasion by way of Canada. Consequently, when word reached Philadelphia that the fort had been evacuated after only a token resistance, there were dismay and chagrin, especially among the New England delegates in Congress who had opposed Schuyler. Schuyler's defenders in turn placed the blame on New England for failing to provide their full quota of men for the Northern army. There was an immediate call to court-martial St. Clair and those officers responsible for the retreat. Charges and countercharges flew back and forth. It was true, Warren admitted, that "languor, supineness, and want of public virtue and spirit" prevailed in the Northern states and that they had repeatedly failed to raise their quota of soldiers, but had the Southern states done notably better? "The indignation and distrust that prevails here are extreme, and the want of confidence in your commanders . . . such that if it be not removed by Lincoln's being sent there to command, the militia will very much impede our reinforcements." In other words, without a general officer of their own choosing the New Englanders would not march to reinforce the retreating army under St. Clair. By Schuyler's calculations the army under his command, which by disease and desertion grew smaller every day, totaled not more than four thousand men (it was almost impossible to get exact figures), of whom a third were "Negroes, boys, and men too aged for field or indeed any other service. . . . I may add," the General continued in a report to Congress, "that a very great part of the army took the field, in a manner, naked; without blankets, ill armed, and very deficient in accouterments, and still continue so." To increase the humiliation, the officers, many of whom would "be a disgrace to the most contemptible troops that were ever collected," had allowed and at times apparently encouraged their soldiers to commit "the most scandalous depredations . . . on the poor distressed, ruined and flying inhabitants."[28]

Adams had always feared that the Ticonderoga garrison would come to grief. It violated his principle of concentration of forces and it was too isolated for effective supply and reinforcement. Although, like his colleagues in Congress, he was outraged over the readiness with which the painstakingly built fort was abandoned at the first sign of danger, still he was determined to suspend judgment until he knew the facts. As the investigation proceeded Adams became convinced that there had been dereliction of duty among those in command. "I think we shall never defend posts until we shoot a General," he observed bluntly. "After that we shall defend posts, and this event, in my opinion, is not far off. . . . We must trifle no more. . . . Every disgrace must be wiped off!"[29]

Gates replaced Schuyler and it was left for New England, declared John in a letter home, to "exert itself to its utmost efforts. Never was [there] a more glorious opportunity than Burgoyne has given us of destroying him by marching down so far to Albany. Let New England turn out and cut off his retreat!"[30]

XXIII

At the end of March word reached Congress of the first notable fruits of independence. The American commissioners to France had received a warmer welcome than Congress had dared to anticipate. France had offered three million livres without interest for the duration of the war. "All Europe," Adams wrote Warren, "wish us well, excepting only Portugal and Russia . . . all the ports of France and Spain and Italy and all the ports in the Mediterranean, excepting Portugal, are open to our privateers and merchant ships. . . . In short, my friend, although we have many grievous things to bear, and shall have more; yet there is nothing wanting but patience. Patience and perseverance will carry us through this mighty enterprise—an enterprise that is and will be an astonishment to vulgar minds all over the world in this and future generations." It was an enterprise which "faithfulness to our ancestors who have set us examples of resistance to tyranny, faithfulness to the present and future generations whose freedom depend upon it," required them to carry through to a successful conclusion.[1]

At the same time Adams was not convinced that a war between France and England would serve the best interests of the United States. It might be that the other European nations would line up with each of the belligerents—in which event American trade would suffer much more than if a general war were avoided. "If we could have a free trade with Europe, I should rather run the risk of fighting it out with George and his present allies. . . . I do not like to be entangled in the quarrels of Europe; I do not wish to be under obligations to any of them, and I am very unwilling they should rob us of the glory of vindicating our own liberties. . . . It is a cowardly spirit in our countrymen," he added, "which makes them pant with so much longing expectation after a French war. I have very often been ashamed to hear so many Whigs groaning and sighing with despondency, and whining out their fears that we must be subdued, unless France should step in. Are we to be beholden to France for our liberties? . . . The surest and the only way to secure her arms in this cause is for us to exert our own."

The King of Prussia had let the American agents in Paris know that he would be glad to have a representative of Congress at Berlin. While the Dutch were still cautiously neutral, they were more friendly to America than might have been expected in view of their close ties to Britain. The financial condition of Spain, Sweden and Denmark was good and they were favorably inclined to the American cause. Thus, while the immediate expectation of a loan was small, once France or Spain formally acknowledged American independence, money might very well be forthcoming.[2]

Throughout the spring Congress "filled up" encouragingly, until there were more delegates and more states represented than there had been since the early months of Congress. New York, so often backward in the cause, dispatched six delegates to Philadelphia, all of them stout Whigs. Indeed, two of the veterans, James Duane and John Jay, who had sometimes displayed a hesitant and temporizing spirit, were being hailed as the Adamses of New York. "I hope," John wrote Abigail wryly, "they will be sensible of the illustrious distinction, and be sure to behave in a manner becoming it."[3]

Adams was delighted with the new delegate from South Carolina, which was one of his favorite states, the only one to defend a fort and successfully repulse the enemy. Henry Laurens, he related to Abigail, was "a gentleman of great fortune, great abilities, modesty and integrity, and great experience too. If all the states would send us such men, it would be a pleasure to be here."

Sporadic debate continued on the Articles of Confederation. Jefferson, in Virginia, wrote Adams in May that he had heard the confederation was "again on the carpet, a great and necessary work, but I fear almost desperate." It was the manner of representation that especially alarmed Jefferson, as he feared that "the great and small colonies are bitterly determined not to cede." He reminded Adams of "the proposition I formerly made you in private"—that any law might be negatived by the representatives of a majority of the people of America, or by a majority of the states. This would secure the interests of both large and small states and provide the basis of a compromise that all fair and liberal men could agree upon.[4]

But Congress could not find an acceptable formula and preferred to occupy itself with making up a list of gifts to be sent to France as presents to the ladies of the court. Mr. Rittenhouse's planetarium had been suggested, "Narragansett pacing mares, mooses, wood ducks, flying squirrels, red-winged blackbirds, cranberries, and rattlesnakes have all been thought of," John wrote Abigail, adding caustically, "Is this not a pretty employment for great statesmen as we think ourselves to be?"[5] Proper employment or not, there was something very touching in the picture of Congress searching for things authentically American to be presented to the frivolous and sophisticated ladies of the French court.

From presents for French ladies Congress turned back to the almost insoluble problem of raising money to carry on the war. It was obvious to any financial abecedarian that Congress was printing itself into bankruptcy, but while fighting a war against, among other things, unjust taxation, it was understandably reluctant to impose heavy taxes, particularly as it had no adequate machinery for collecting them. Still, in Adams' view, "taxation as deep as possible" was the only cure. "I hope," he instructed Abigail, "you will pay every tax that is brought you, if you sell my books or clothes or oxen, or your cows, to pay it."[6]

Besides taxation Adams' remedy for the desperate state of the Continental finances was economy, the banishing of all luxuries, the curtailment of imports to military necessities. General Washington set an excellent example by banishing wine from his table and entertaining his friends with rum and water. "If necessity should reduce us to a simplicity of dress and diet becoming republicans, it would be a happy and glorious necessity," he confided to Abigail. "Happy should I be indeed, if I could share with you in the products of your little farm. Milk, and apples, and pork, and beef, and the fruits of the garden would be luxury to me."[7]

The Tories presented yet another problem to bedevil Congress. At every setback to the Continental cause, the opposing party became increasingly bold. Thirteen were proscribed in Braintree alone, and Abigail wrote that Boston abounded with "designing Tories and ignorant, avaricious Whigs."[8] They showed remarkable persistence and often considerable courage in attempting to sabotage the American cause. They provided the British with a stream of information about the plans and forces of the United States; they intercepted postriders and seized dispatches; they counterfeited money and made plans to operate as irregular forces in conjunction with the approaching British; they spread demoralizing rumors which were plentiful enough without their efforts; they attempted to undermine enactments of Continental Congress and, in short, did everything that they dared to hamper and harass the patriots in their struggle for independence. No one knows how many Tories there were during the Revolution, but much of the Carolina back country was strongly Tory in its sympathies. Ferguson's Rangers were made up of American Tories, many of them from the Southern frontier, well-led and highly effective soldiers. The King's Rifles were largely recruited from Tories of New York. But those who actually took up arms with the British were only a small minority. Many, many more expressed their resistance to independence in small, often inconspicuous but, taken all together, dangerous ways.

To the patriots, fighting as they were against enormous odds, their betrayal by Tories was a greater source of bitterness than the tyranny of the Mother Country. Here, literally, as Adams well knew, friend was set against friend, father against son, husband against wife. Here lay grief and rancor more galling for the intimacy out of which they sprang. Under the stress of what was, at least in their view, a struggle for survival, the patriots were frequently harsh and cruel to the Tories, men and women who held fast to their own convictions under the most trying circumstances and often at great personal cost; yet the patriots had great provocation and, if they were overly severe, it is an easy enough judgment for historians to make writing generations after the events and weighing out praise and blame with meticulous scholarly care. These historians, sometimes inclined to rebuke or patronize the patriots for their treatment of the Tories, live in an age when a wretched remnant of domestic Communists, during peacetime, have kept a great nation in a fever of anxiety and apprehension ostensibly for its own safety.

Overworked and worried by his eyes, Adams fell into one of his periodic depressions. It seemed a cruel fortune that he must spend so much time far distant from the things dearest to him. Abnormally sensitive, he suffered equally from grim rumors and unhappy truths. As he divulged to Abigail, "I, who would not hurt the hair of the head of any animal, I, who am always made miserable by the misery of every susceptible being that comes to my knowledge, am obliged to hear continual accounts of the barbarities, the cruel murders in cold blood even by the most tormenting ways of starving and freezing, committed by our enemies. . . . These accounts harrow me beyond description." The Howe brothers, he declared, were monsters of cruelty who would be ranked by posterity "with Pizarro, with Borgia, with Alva, and with others in the annals of infamy, whose memories are entitled to the hisses and execrations of all virtuous men." Adams comforted himself with the thought that "misfortune as well as infamy awaits these men. They are doomed to defeat and destruction. . . . America is universally convinced of the necessity of meeting them in the field in firm battalion, and American fire is terrible."[9] Historians, painters, sculptors and poets should advertise to the world the "brutal barbarities and diabolical impieties" of the British army.

To Adams' hint that the cruelties practiced by the British on their American prisoners should bring retribution, Abigail replied by quoting Tillotson on revenge and adding, "If our cause is just, it will be best supported by justice and righteousness. Though we have many other crimes to answer for, that of cruelty to our enemies is not chargeable upon Americans, and I hope never will be."[10]

In addition to the atrocities suffered by American prisoners in the hands of the British, there was the even more distressing attrition of the

American forces through illness. Morbid and depressed, Adams walked through the Potter's Field of Philadelphia, among "the congregation of the dead"—the more than two thousand soldiers who had died of camp diseases. It was a toll more terrible than that exacted by the enemy. To die in battle was at least a glorious death; to rot away on a dirty pallet was bitter beyond speaking. There in misery and cold and the choking fear of death, hundreds upon hundreds of young men had lain down, far from all the comforts and consolations of home, and died in squalid suffering and despair. Making his way between the rows of fresh graves, Adams was torn as never before by the horror and agony of war, and by a terrible sense of personal involvement. What could one say of the glories of liberty in such a place? This was all part of the price that must be paid, that he had never hesitated to insist should be paid. And now a sense of the loneliness and terror of these wasted lives rose up about him from the raw and mutilated earth. Had he truly a right to calculate such a price for freedom? It was the waste that most appalled him. Most of these deaths need not have been. Tents to keep off the cold, soaking rain, vegetables to prevent scurvy and diarrhea, soap to keep hands and bodies clean, proper camp sanitation—all these things had been lacking and all would have saved lives. But above all there was the lack of discipline—discipline in the army, government in the state. These were essential on the one hand to efficiency, on the other to freedom. Without discipline there was no order, and without order no cleanliness, and without cleanliness disease with its insatiable appetites ravaged the camps and the hospitals. Again too late, Congress had attempted to muster "the best abilities in physic and chirurgery that the continent afforded." "Disease," Adams wrote to Abigail, "has destroyed ten men for us where the sword of the enemy has killed one."[11]

During John's winter vacation from Congress, Abigail had conceived and was three months' pregnant by the time he set out for Baltimore. It was an additional burden for both of them to bear. Her pregnancies were always difficult ones and she missed him more than ever. "I visit you almost every night," she wrote, "or you me, but waking the agreeable delusion vanishes—'like the baseless fabrick of a vision.'"[12] His letters helped to overcome her "melancholy reflections," though compared to their author they were "a cold comfort in a winter's night." In Braintree life was austere enough. There was no sugar, molasses, rum, coffee or chocolate to be bought, and Abigail suggested John might buy a pound or so at a time in Philadelphia if any were available. The act to regulate prices was generally ignored and people got for their goods what the market could bear. If the family, and especially Abigail, missed such modest luxuries, there was no want of food supplied by the farm; Johnny, looking quizzically at his mother, had disconcerted her by saying, "Mar, I never saw anybody grow so fat as you do."[13]

When John wrote letters to the older children, he had omitted little Tommy. After his brothers and his sister had gotten theirs, Tommy asked for his letter. His papa had not written to him, Abigail explained, because he had not yet learned to read. At this the tears began to flow and were only stanched when Abigail gave him one of her letters as his own. The others, meanwhile, were comparing their respective letters—the child with the longest letter crowing over those less richly favored.

John hastened to repair the damage to Tommy's feelings by writing a long letter. Tommy, Abigail had told him, wished to be a general. "I believe I must make a physician of you. . . . There seems to be a propriety in your studying physic," his father wrote, "because your great-grandfather, after whom you were named, was of that profession. Would it not please you to study nature in all her wonderful operations? and to relieve your fellow creatures, under the severest pain and distresses to which human nature is liable? Is this not better than to be destroying mankind by the thousands? If you are of this opinion you will change your title from General to Doctor. It requires the character of rugged and tough to go through the hardships of riding and walking night and day, to visit the sick, as well as to take care of an army."[14]

April was a kind of doldrum month in Congress. John took advantage of the lull—"Not a breath nor a wave, no news or noise . . . the clock calm . . . in the political and military hemisphere"—to write Abigail almost daily. He had taken to rising at four in the morning to get some exercise by riding out into the countryside before he had to go off to committee meetings, to the Board of War, and to Congress; he often wrote Abigail as soon as he had arisen: "The charms of the morning at this hour are irresistible. The streams of glory dawning in the east, the freshness and purity in the air, the bright blue of the sky, the sweet warblings of a great variety of birds intermingling with the martial clarions of a hundred cocks . . . all conspire to cheer the spirits." In a few minutes he would be mounted on his little mare, riding out of the city into the awakening countryside, jeweled with dew and gleaming "most deliciously" in the early rays of the sun.

Another morning at four-thirty, his eyes weak and sore, a cold hanging on with stubborn persistence, he rode out the straight, broad way to Point-no-Point, past the buttonwoods, oaks, walnuts and cherries lining the sides of the road. Down by the riverbanks the willows touched their branches in the water and the meadows and pastures spread out green as leeks. The grain fields—the rye and wheat—were planted with a stunning symmetry straight as an arrow. The pale, tender shoots of corn were just coming up, the squares between the lines as precise as if they had been drawn by a mathematician's ruler. Such a scene of neat and loving husbandry made him impatient with the careless farmers of his native state. They were lazy farmers but industrious politicians, which was enough to redeem them in Adams' eyes. Charming as the scene before him was, the rugged "native face" of his homeland with hill and valley, sea and land stirred his soul more deeply.[15]

If Abigail was without sugar, molasses and rum, John was without wine, which was so scarce and so expensive that he was reduced to giving his visitors a plain toddy of rum (which was dear enough) and water, while the small supply of wine was jealously hoarded and given only "once in a while to a great stranger of uncommon consequence." Worse still, he could get no cider in the city, not a drop was to be had for gold; he would gladly give three guineas for a barrel of Abigail's.[16]

With time to write, he gave attention once more to the education of the children. He was especially pleased with the precociousness of John Quincy. "With his capacity and opportunities," he wrote Abigail, "he cannot fail to acquire knowledge." But of even greater importance were "the moral sentiments of his heart . . . temperance, justice, magnanimity, honor and generosity . . . with these added to his parts he cannot fail to become a wise and great man." He should read the newspapers and note the principal acts and episodes of the war, and as he read history Abigail must ask him what events made the deepest impression on him, what characters he admired and which ones he despised.[17]

To John Quincy himself, he commended a study of "the history of the causes which have produced the late revolution of our government. No study in which you can engage will be more worthy of you." He must discern the principal characters in civil, political and military life and do so with the greatest impartiality, examining the motives and principles of each actor with attention only to the truth. Even his father's actions must pass the same objective scrutiny. He should also compare the glorious Revolution of 1688, the revolutions in Portugal, Sweden and Rome, the separation of the Helvetic Confederacy from the Austrian Empire, a revolution closely resembling that of America, and most important, conclude with the "history of the Flemish confederacy, by which the seven United Provinces of the Netherlands emancipated themselves from the domination of Spain. The best work on the subject is that of Cardinal Bentivoglio." Bentivoglio, like Clarendon, was a courtier, "and on the side of monarchy and the hierarchy. But allowances must be made for that," Adams added.[18]

The war would attract his attention much more, of course, when he was older. Moreover, the "future circumstances of your country," he noted, "may require other wars, as well as councils and negotiations," similar to those that were being carried on at present. Adams thus wished to turn his son's "thoughts early to such studies as will afford you the most solid instruction and improvement for the part which may be allotted you to act upon the stage of life." For that purpose there was no better master than Thucydides. John Quincy must read that historian in Greek—"the most perfect of all human languages." He would need a translation to help him and he would find in his father's library the works of Thomas Hobbes, "in which, among a great deal of mischievous philosophy, you will find a learned and exact translation of Thucydides." John Quincy would discover the book to be "full of instruction to the orator, the statesman, the general, as well as to the historian and the philosopher."[19]

To such awesome injunctions the ten-year-old boy replied with a child's candor: "I love to receive letters very well much better than I love to write them, but I make but a poor figure at composition, my head is much too fickle; my thoughts are running after birds' eggs, play and trifles, till I get vexed with myself." He had only read the third volume of Smollet, he confessed, although he had vowed to finish it by now, but he was determined to be more diligent. He had set himself a daily stint and he would faithfully perform it, especially if his father would give him "some instructions with regard to my time and advise me how to proportion my studies and my play, in writing, and I will keep them by me and endeavor to follow them. I am, dear sir, with a present determination of growing better, yours. . . ."[20]

The Braintree spring which John missed so in Philadelphia had no savor for Abigail in her condition. "In vain," she wrote, "the spring blooms or the birds sing. Their music has not its former melody, nor the spring its usual pleasures." The coming of hot weather increased her discomfort, and sleepless nights left her weak and unwell. "I am cut off," she noted wistfully, "from the privilege which some of the brute creation enjoy, that of having their mate sit beside them with anxious care during their . . . confinement."[21] Nabby was a great comfort to Abigail but she could not take the place of her absent father. As the time drew near for the birth of her child she felt increasing anxiety. She had premonitions of death in childbirth with her adored husband far away. She missed "the soothing tenderness of his affection." "Is this weakness?" she asked. The politics of her state further lowered her spirits. There was a growing bitterness between the city of Boston and the country. The eastern part of the state was divided against the west. Some towns had instructed their delegates to push for a new frame of government; others had forbidden theirs. "Avarice, venality, animosity, contention, pride, weakness and dissipation" were apparent in capital and cottage alike. Money had so diminished in value that barter was rapidly replacing it. Wool was traded for flax, beef and pork for salt and sugar. Abigail was uncomfortably large and moved about the little house with difficulty. There were a thousand tedious details to attend to about the farm: the work of Prince to oversee, accounts to be kept, and taxes to be paid. In spite of all this she managed by some alchemy of household finance to send a hundred dollars to Boston to purchase Continental loan certificates. The children's lessons also were a perpetual concern. But these were the distractions of the day. As always, the night was the hardest part of the twenty-four hours to get through. Even though she had always been a night owl, it was these hours, with the children tucked away, that were the most desperately lonely. With the house quiet as a grave, she sometimes went to bed and read over John's letters and journals and recalled happy times that the family had spent together—the visit to Salem, the Fast Day expeditions to Weymouth, the cheerful, social hours with the Cranches, the leisurely walks up Penn's Hill to picnic above the blue waters of the bay. Thus she must get through, as best she could, the "wakeful and lonesome" nights when she would often arouse from sleep with the fleeting impression of the loved presence, John's solid, sturdy body, beside her. But the impression was, alas, as vagrant as her recurring dreams. It was almost too much to bear to think of the six long months before his return. In war the patient waiters are the true heroes. John was, after all, sustained by his conviction that he was a leading actor in the greatest event in history; while Abigail shared that conviction she was not involved day by day in a course of events which, however wearisome, had far more range and challenge than the routine of farm and household to which she was bound. It was not that she resented her role, or thought of it as the more arduous, it was simply that it was; that it took greater fortitude, greater courage, greater perseverance than even her husband's endless round of Continental business. That round contained much that was social, much that was novel, much that was curious and entertaining.

For his part, John, as the time for Abigail's confinement approached, was obsessed by the gloomiest feelings. He had been away during the terrible epidemic of dysentery that had carried off so many in Braintree, through the long, painful ordeal of the smallpox, and now through the most anxious time of all. "Oh," he wrote, "that I could be near to say a few kind words or show a few anxious looks, or do a few kind actions. Oh, that I could take from my dearest a share of her distress, or relieve her of the whole." Abigail treasured every phrase of love and devotion. They must be sustained by each other's love.[22]

Early in July, Abigail experienced new and disturbing symptoms. In the final weeks of her pregnancy she was seized with frightening paroxysms of shaking. She was convinced that the life that she carried within her was lost. For two days she felt ill and, although the doctor tried to reassure her, she remained convinced that her child was dead. Almost worn out with pain and anxiety, she tried to write John but labor pains interrupted her letter so that she must lay down her pen "to bear what I cannot fly from—and now I have endured it I reassume my pen." The late frost had damaged the fruit trees, the corn looked well and the hay crop would be good but manure was needed for the fields and help was so dear it was impossible to hire for a day's mowing at less than six shillings. Writing so of the daily matters of the farm in the midst of her weariness and suffering, her heart cried out for her husband. "Almighty God carry me safely through," she added.

Though she slept the night, she felt more ill than ever the next day, and that evening, after a prolonged and difficult labor, a daughter was delivered, stillborn but fully formed, "an exceeding fine-looking child," John Thaxter wrote to Adams.[23] Abigail, who in a sense had already mourned the death of the tiny being, was too numb and exhausted to feel anything but a strange release. The boys were dazed, hushed and silent, but Nabby wept inconsolably for hours. She had longed for a baby sister to mother and love, and now was the one who suffered most from its death.

Abigail had never recovered so quickly, "never was so well in so short a time before." She had dreamed of presenting John with a fine son or daughter and imagined his look of delight but these dreams were buried in her infant's grave, "transitory as the morning cloud." "If you will come home and turn farmer," she wrote, "I will be dairy woman [and] we will grow wealthy."[24]

For his part, John was so relieved that Abigail had passed her ordeal safely that he hardly repined for the dead infant. He had been forearmed by Abigail's premonition. It was the will of God. Although he spoke feelingly of the midsummer heat that settled relentlessly on the city—"poor mortals pant and sweat, under the burning skies, faint and feeble as children. We seem as if we were dissolving away"—he found some cause for optimism. The army was finally taking shape, privateers were making severe inroads on British shipping, French help would prevent serious shortages in arms and equipment.

General Mifflin had collected tents, entrenching tools, camp kettles, canteens, horses, magazines of forage, and wagons ready for an army of twenty thousand men. The medical department had received a fine cargo of drugs; meat had been prepared and salted. "We are doing everything in our power," he wrote a friend, "for the discipline and comfort of the army. Nothing in this contest," he added, "has given me so much pain as the sufferings of the soldiers in sickness and for want of discipline, to which, indeed, that sickness was in a great measure owing." The struggle with Great Britain, in truth, was a desperate one. "Hard as it is, however," Adams wrote, "it will succeed. May Heaven direct us, and conduct us safely in the due time to liberty, to virtue, and, of course, to glory!"[25] The situation of the year past was reversed; supplies were ready, only men were needed.

Adams' own energies were at a low ebb. "I am wasted and exhausted in mind and body, with incessant application to business," he wrote Abigail, "but if I can possibly endure it, will hold out the year." August 20 would mark a full three years since he had stepped into the coach at Cushing's door and started out for Philadelphia "in quest of adventures," as he put it a little wryly to Abigail, adding, "and adventures I have found. I feel an inclination sometimes to write the history of the last three years, in imitation of Thucydides. There is a striking resemblance in several particulars between the Peloponnesian and the American war. The real motive to the former was a jealousy of the growing power of Athens by sea and land. The genuine motive to the latter was a similar jealousy of the growing power of America. The true causes which incite to war are seldom professed or acknowledged."[26]

His three years of service had been tedious and demanding beyond description. "What have I not suffered?" he asked. "What have I not hazarded? . . . Let the cymbals of popularity tinkle still. Let the butterflies of fame glitter with their wings. I shall envy neither their music or their colors. The loss of property affects me little. All other hard things I despise. . . .[27] Never was [a] wretch more weary of misery than I am of the life I lead, condemned to the dullest servitude and drudgery, separated from all that I love, and wedded to all that I hate. Digging in a potato yard upon my own garden and living in my own family would be to me paradise. The next time I come home shall be for a long time." He longed to swing Tom up onto his shoulders or play at his favorite game of prisoner and warden, but even though homesick he was determined not to "leave the field until the campaign is ended."[28]

"I feel my sufferings amply rewarded," Abigail replied, "in the tenderness you express for me. . . . It is almost thirteen years since we were united, but not more than half that time have we had the happiness of living together. The unfeeling world may consider it in what light they please. I consider it as a sacrifice to my country, and one of my greatest misfortunes, for you to be separated from my children, at a time of life when the joint instructions and admonitions of parents sink deeper than in maturer years."[29]

All spring Howe had backed and filled, sailing out of the harbor of New York and returning, heading for Halifax or Rhode Island and then turning south toward the mouth of the Delaware while Washington's army marched and countermarched through much of the stifling summer. The report reached Philadelphia that the British general's plans were "all deranged," as indeed they seemed to be. His army had sailed round in circles and was now encamped where it had started from. The Tories, in consequence, were "miserably disappointed" and a Hessian general, worn out with his commander's indecision, had "gone home in a miff."[30]

Finally, after weeks of uncertainty and false alarms, Howe's fleet, two hundred and twenty-eight sail, appeared at the mouth of Delaware Bay, off Cape Henlopen. Washington came down from his headquarters at

Morristown with his army close behind, to plan the defense of the city. But on the second of August the fleet sailed off. It was sighted first off Cape Ann and the alarm given that Boston was once more his destination. The whole town was in confusion, "packing up and carrying out . . . household furniture, military stores, goods, etc. Not less than a thousand teams were employed." Those with wagons profiteered, some of them charging a hundred dollars a load. Abigail, weak as she was, set about packing her things and sent a load to Weymouth before being notified that the armada had sailed southward.[31]

Meanwhile word came from the north of Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne's invasion of the colonies from Canada; a mad excursion intended to split the New England states from their sisters. "Burgoyne is laying himself open to destruction in that quarter every day," Adams wrote his wife. "It is strange no check is given to him."[32]

In the middle of August word reached the city that Howe was back once more with his fleet. This time he was headed up the Chesapeake, apparently to land his troops at the head of the bay and approach Philadelphia from the south. As soon as the news was confirmed, Washington, encamped north of Philadelphia, made plans to march his army through the city—along Front Street, up Chestnut, across the Schuylkill River bridge. It rained the preceding night and for a time it seemed as though the great parade would be dampened, but it cleared at dawn and at seven o'clock in the morning the army, spruced up as best it could be, began clattering and rumbling over the cobblestoned streets: the infantry twelve abreast, the artillery with a mixed but impressive assortment of fieldpieces, four regiments of light horse with sabers drawn, bony horses carefully groomed, the engineers with their equipment—the four "grand divisions" of the army—accompanied by the quartermaster corps and the medical units, to the music of numerous fifes and drums, the whole "extremely well armed, pretty well clothed, and tolerably disciplined." It took the troops four hours to pass a given point, and with weapons scoured and gleaming in the sun, uniforms carefully patched and hats decorated with sprigs of fir, the Continental Army made an impressive appearance. John Adams, both proud and critical, watched the troops march by. The men looked tanned and toughened from the weeks of marching and countermarching occasioned by Howe's strange peregrinations and they walked with a confident swing, but the farmer and the artisan still showed through. "Our soldiers have not yet quite the air of soldiers," Adams noted. "They don't step exactly in time. They don't hold up their heads quite erect, nor turn their toes so exactly as they ought." Some still strode as though they were following a plow. "They don't cock their hats; and such as do, don't all wear them the same way."[33]

Nonetheless Adams was sure the sight had put new heart in the "timorous Whigs," given pause to the "cunning Quakers," and dismayed the "rascally Tories." Perhaps at last the formidable British regulars and their Hessian auxiliaries would be checked, and if not, Howe must use his forces to occupy the city, leaving "New England and New York at leisure to kill or catch Burgoyne. . . . Now is the time!" he wrote Abigail. "Never was so good an opportunity for my countrymen to turn out and crush that vaporing, blustering bully to atoms."[34]

It was another trying period of anxiety for Abigail. If Howe captured Philadelphia with Congress in it, the delegates, or at least a number of the leading ones, might be shipped to England to stand trial for treason. The city might be fired. There might be fighting in the streets in which the lives of civilians would be imperiled.

John wrote to reassure her. "Don't be anxious for my safety," he enjoined her. "If Howe comes here I shall run away, I suppose, with the rest. We are too brittle ware, you know, to stand the dashing of balls and bombs." While the Roman senators had preferred to be put to the sword rather than fly from the invading Gauls, Adams and his colleagues did not intend "to indulge this sort of dignity," although, he confessed, he longed to meet the "barbarian Britons" on the field and to exact some personal recompense for the misery which they had caused his country. But it was too late; he was forty-two, too old and too feeble to buckle on a sword.[35] Yet Abigail continued to fret. She dreamed constantly of John; one night she dreamed that he had returned to Braintree "but met me so coldly that my heart ached half an hour after I waked."[36]

With the prices of everything rising daily and labor exorbitant, Abigail found that the farm, however thriftily managed, would not support her and the children. John's expenses were chargeable to the Massachusetts General Court, but there was no provision in the sums paid him for maintaining two establishments. Abigail wanted her husband home. "I cannot consent to your tarrying much longer," she wrote. ". . . I shall send you word by and by and by, as Regulus' steward did, that whilst you are engaged in the Senate your own domestic affairs require your presence at home, and that your wife and children are in danger of wanting bread. If the Senate of America will take care of us, as the Senate of Rome did of the family of Regulus, you may serve them again; but unless you return, what little property you possess will be lost."

Her own courage never wavered. "We possess a spirit that will not be conquered," she wrote John. "If our men are all drawn off and we should be attacked, you would find a race of Amazons in America."[37] If the men of America tried to negotiate a peace with Howe "an army of women would oppose him." When the Saracens turned their backs to the enemy, she reminded him, they were slain by their women.

She had asked for a map on which she could trace military operations, and when Adams mentioned the request to James Lovell, the Massachusetts delegate undertook to send it under his congressional frank. When the letter containing the map reached Braintree addressed in Lovell's hand, terror seized her. She imagined that her husband lay ill or dead and that Lovell, whom she hardly knew, had written to break the news. For a time she could not bring herself to break the seal; finally, trembling with anxiety, she opened it and began to read it from the bottom upward, a line at a time, until the letter lay on her desk robbed of its power to make her hand tremble and her heart pound. Once she had gotten over her fright, she reread it. Her husband, Lovell wrote, had asked him to secure a map of Howe's route for her. He could have handed the map to Adams but "I could not with delicacy have told him *to his face* that your having given your heart to *such* a man is what, most of all, makes me yours."[38] It was an odd compliment, she thought, and as she read the expressions of admiration for John and the insinuations of more than friendly affection for herself, she felt herself blushing. It was certainly a bold and presumptuous letter, but womanlike she cherished the compliments and when she wrote next to John she included a brief note thanking Lovell for his courtesy and mentioning to her husband the "very polite letter" of his Massachusetts colleague.

Lovell was a bright, glib, imprudent man; one of that tribe who managed somehow by sheer presumption to get away with an outrageously loose tongue. He indulged his penchant for double-entendres with surprising recklessness and, taking advantage of the occasion provided by sending the map and by Abigail's brief acknowledgment of it, he began to write her regularly, treading agilely at the very edge of impropriety, maintaining the role of suitor, or despairing admirer, whichever the case might be.

The correspondence made Abigail uneasy but she was at a loss as to how to terminate it without seeming rude and abrupt and in truth she was entertained and flattered by the flow of compliments. The fact was that there was more than a little of the flirt in Abigail. She found, for instance, more comfort and entertainment than she was likely to reveal to John in the several attractive and literate young men of the village, especially John Thaxter, who had been Adams' law clerk before he left to attend Congress. Abigail thoroughly enjoyed the company of witty and intelligent males. She was conscious of her ability to meet them on their own terms without any concessions for her sex (among her feminine acquaintances perhaps only Mercy Warren was her intellectual equal), and she delighted in the play of minds over a subject, the thrust and parry of good argument, the exhilaration of turning an idea this way and that until it caught light from other minds and flashed like a diamond. For Abigail conversation was the most exciting and rewarding pastime, dear to her because, in addition to being an inspired play, it was improving and moral. Moreover, since she was a very attractive and thoroughly feminine woman, with no trace about her of the self-conscious female pedant that her husband so deplored, these conversations, particularly those that were tête-à-tête, had a subtle undercurrent of sexual stimulus. Abigail would have been shocked, of course, at the suggestion, or at least would have professed to be. But there was a certain archness in her glance and speech, in her talk with her first cousin John Thaxter and his friends of the hazards of love, of the delights of the married state, and the qualities to look for in a wife. It was a tribute to her innate reserve and self-control that in spite of many such mild flirtations Lovell was the only one of her symbolic suitors who ever presumed upon the relationship.

During the period of Howe's attack on Philadelphia and the flight of Congress from that city, almost three weeks passed without a letter from John. Abigail's anxiety was increased by an accident to Tommy. Spying a hen robbing the pea vines upon which his mother had lavished so much attention, he had rushed to shoo her off and gashed his leg so badly on an abandoned scythe that the doctor had to sew up the skin as Abigail would stitch up a ripped pantaloon. Tommy had borne the pain, his mother wrote proudly, like a soldier.

Through the weeks without news she comforted herself with the thought of God's wisdom and providence. He had often directed that things which appeared disasters should turn out for the best. "So true it is," she wrote John, "acknowledge Him in all thy ways and He shall direct thy paths." Dashing off a hasty note to him to catch the morning post, she concluded, "Good night, friend of my heart, companion of my youth, husband, and lover. Angels watch thy repose!"[39]

Word, when it came, was cause for delight. John intended to "crawl home upon my little pony," as soon as he could. "The people," he wrote, "are universally calling for fighting and for blood. Washington is getting into the humor of fighting, and Howe begins to dread it. And well he may. Fighting will certainly answer the end, although we may be beaten every time for a great while."[40]

Meantime the city of Philadelphia, subject to the accident of wars, was victim of the accidents of nature and lay "sweltering . . . for a great number of days together under the scalding wrath of the day star. . . . So severe a spell of heat," John wrote Abigail, "has scarcely been known these twenty years. The air of the city has been like the fiery breath of a hot oven." The pumps ran all day long drawing up water for the parched inhabitants. John who, like his wife, was especially susceptible to the heat suffered acutely. "Enfeebled and irritated," unable to sleep soundly and tormented by night sweats, he had hardly strength to hold a pen in his hand.[41] "Writing this at six o'clock in the morning in my cool chamber has thrown me into a profuse . . . sweat. . . . This horrid hot weather melts the marrow within my bones and makes me faint away almost," he added. The temperature soared over one hundred in the shade and John took what comfort he could from the thought that

Howe's fleet was even hotter on the ocean. "I wish this wiseacre may continue to coast about until an equinoctial storm shall overtake him." In any event "a scorbutic army, cooped up in a fleet for six, seven or eight weeks" in stifling weather, should not have much fight left in it. "Oh, for a bowl of your punch, a bottle of your cider, or something or other as acid," he wrote Abigail. To refresh himself he was obliged to drink a wineglass of vinegar in a pint of water. A number of people died of the heat and even more, it was reported, from drinking cold water.

Finally the heat broke—"Dr. Franklin in his letters on electricity has explained the philosophy of it," Adams noted—and the refreshing rain came down in torrents "most delightfully," as John wrote, adding, "The world is all of a blaze with lightning, and grand rolls of thunder shake the very chamber where I am. The windows jar, the shutters clatter, and the floor trembles."[42]

XXIV

In the latter part of August, Howe landed his forces at the mouth of the Elk River and began his march to Philadelphia. Along with the word of Howe's arrival came excellent news from the North. The Indians and Tories were reported to have received "a very fine drubbing," but most heartening of all was the word that General Stark and his militia had attacked a large foraging expedition of Hessians from Burgoyne's army and killed or captured most of the seven-hundred-man force. Reinforcements sent out to rescue the party had likewise been repulsed with heavy losses.

Washington had largely Southern forces with him as he took up a defensive position at Brandywine Creek. He was outnumbered by Howe in regular troops 15,000 to 10,000, but poorly armed and trained militia poured in to augment his army. In the North, Gates, his army growing daily by fresh increments of New England minutemen, tightened a noose around Burgoyne. "New England men, strike home!" Adams exhorted.[1]

As the hour in which the battle would be joined approached, Adams gave free rein to his optimism. Washington and his army would drive Howe all the way back to the Chesapeake Bay. The only danger was that Howe might become frightened and run away before he could be given his lumps. But Philadelphia was a perfect trap. It might even be expedient to let him occupy the city. An occupation would purify the place of its timidity and neutralism. The country might be better off with Howe "cooped up" in Philadelphia. In a way it was too bad that he must be thrown back to harass Congress and the country with his inexplicable but nerve-racking cruises and false forays. But the next day he had second thoughts. The best policy might be not to attack Howe unless the ground offered some irresistible advantage. "It would be imprudent, perhaps, for us with our whole force to attack them with all theirs." Indeed, it might be better to avoid an engagement altogether. Costly as a defeat would be to Howe, a serious American defeat would set back the painstaking creation of a Continental Army many months more, for it was unmistakably an army in the shaping, not yet fully formed.

Adams kept in constant touch with Washington's headquarters, reading all the dispatches and collecting every scrap of news about the plans and dispositions of both armies—British and American. Prisoners were captured and interrogated. They declared that the British soldiers were generally healthy and in the number of some eighteen thousand, but Adams scoffed at the figure. He knew better. It was more like half that number.

He worried about Washington's excessive caution as it sometimes seemed to him, and for the moment his emotions clouded his judgment. He felt a sudden revulsion against hesitation and delay. He was "sick of Fabian systems in all quarters. . . . The officers drink, 'A long and moderate war,'" he wrote Abigail. "My toast is, 'A short and violent war.' They would call me mad and rash, etc., but I know better. I am as cool as any of them, for my mind is not inflamed with fear or anger, whereas I believe theirs are with both." It seemed to him that the situation was wholly favorable to American arms. If Howe lost he was ruined; if he fought an inconclusive action he was equally undone. If he won he would pay a high price and occupy the city with a decimated army. If the two armies came to no test of arms Howe's "reputation would be ruined in his own country and in all Europe, and the dread of him would cease in all America."[2]

Once a general engagement had begun there was of course no telling how it would end, for the battle was not always to the strong or the just. The events of war were uncertain at best. "All that we can do," he wrote Abigail, "is to pray, as I do most devoutly, that we may be victorious; at least, that we may not be vanquished. But if it should be the will of Heaven that our army should be defeated, our artillery lost, our best generals killed, and Philadelphia fall into Mr. Howe's hands, still America is not conquered." America had greater resources to draw upon. Indeed, it might be the design of Providence that the Continental forces should be defeated. It might be God's way of drawing the union closer and laying more deeply the foundations of independence, of curing Americans of "their vicious and luxurious and effeminate appetites, passions and habits, a more dangerous army to American liberty than Mr. Howe's."[3]

On September 11, Howe attacked Washington's army. Cornwallis turned the American right, driving Sullivan's division back in disorder. The American center at Chad's Ford gave way after a spirited resistance and only Greene's inspired leadership prevented a rout. Washington took up new lines just south of the city, uncertain whether to make another attempt with his beaten troops to block what was now clearly a superior force. Congress, remembering its unhappy flight to Baltimore, was determined to wait until the last minute to leave the city and then to establish itself somewhere in the state of Pennsylvania. "Don't be anxious about me, nor about our great and sacred cause," he wrote Abigail. "It is the cause of truth and will prevail."[4]

As the situation of the city grew more critical, the newspapers ceased to be published; Dunlap, the printer, less mobile than a congressman, packed up his types and departed. The Quaker city lay in a strange torpor, a kind of uneasy suspension. It was rather as though everyone held his breath, Whig and Tory alike, uncertain and anxious for the outcome, wishing almost anything if it might be decisive and not too terrible. "The prospect is chilling on every side," Adams noted in his diary, "gloomy, dark, melancholy and dispiriting. When and where will the light spring up? Shall we have good news from Europe? Shall we hear of a blow struck by Gates? Is there a possibility that Washington should beat Howe? . . . From whence is our deliverance to come? Or is it not to come? Is Philadelphia to be lost? If lost, is the cause lost? No, the cause is not lost but it may be hurt."[5]

While the armies lay confronting each other, a violent northeaster lashed the countryside. By the next day it was clear that Washington dared not risk his army at this juncture. Perhaps, under the circumstances, it took more courage to withdraw than to fight. Patiently, firmly, with bitter reflections, he disengaged the wet and tired troops and cleared the way for Howe's occupation of the capital city. Young Colonel Alexander Hamilton, Washington's aide-de-camp, sent word to Philadelphia that the British were in possession of the forts and road to the city and could march into it by morning if they wished. James Lovell roused Adams in his lodgings at the Reverend Mr. Sprout's at three in the morning with the message. Many members of Congress had already decamped. There was little time to be lost. Adams woke his fellow boarder, Henry Marchant, a delegate from Rhode Island; they roused a servant in the house, sent him after their horses, packed their belongings hastily and rode off in the thin, chill air of the fall morning to Bristol, where they had breakfast and discussed with a group of delegates whom they encountered at the tavern where and when Congress should convene. From Bristol, Adams rode on with the delegates to Trenton where he encountered Benjamin Harrison, Witherspoon, and most of the New York and New England members of Congress. At Trenton there was a round of visiting and tea drinking, and Adams went with James Duane, the New Yorker, to look at John Dickinson's estate, recently occupied by Hessian soldiers. The soldiers had dug up the floor of the greenhouse in a search for money. The orange, lemon and lime trees were dead; the rooms of the house itself filthy and defaced; in one bedchamber a pile of smashed bottles, and everywhere a general scene of desolation.

Sunday word came that Howe had not yet entered Philadelphia. Washington lay on the east side of the Schuylkill, and Adams allowed himself, for the first time, some expression of impatience with the Virginian's generalship. If Washington had remained on the west side of the river he might still have blocked Howe's advance. "O Heaven," he wrote in his diary, "grant us one great soul! One leading mind would extricate the best cause from that ruin which seems to await it for the want of it. We have as good a cause as ever was fought for. We have great resources. The people are well tempered. One active, masterly capacity would bring order out of this confusion and save this country."[6] Although Adams had attempted to forearm himself against a British victory and occupation of the city, the event itself sunk him in gloom, and even for a moment something close to despair. Knowing in his heart that Washington's strategy of preserving his army at all costs was essentially correct, knowing how far the Continental Army still was from the well-trained, disciplined force that he insisted it must become, he nonetheless broke forth in bitterness and frustration and, in his heart, cried out for a great, irresistible leader who, in a single whirlwind campaign, would sweep the British into the sea. That he came to this was an indication of the abrasive effect of the long months of work and anxiety. Three years of struggle and tension, almost two years of defeats and withdrawals, of corroding disappointments, and apparently a gradual erosion of the will to resist. It was too much to bear. But a week of riding through the Pennsylvania countryside to the new quarters of Congress healed his spirit and restored his morale—the ride combined with the welcome news that Burgoyne was bulling his way deeper into the trap which Gates held open for him. He wrote Abigail: "My health is a good as common, and I assure you my spirits are not the worse for the loss of Philadelphia."

From Trenton, Adams and his colleagues started for Lancaster where it had been decided Congress was to convene. On the way they passed through Bethlehem and there again John was a fascinated observer of the Moravian community. He visited the children's meeting, which was enlivened with organ music and singing, the society (or choir) of single women, the waterworks and the factory, and walked among the rows of cherry and apple trees, beautifully cared for. In the evening he attended the meeting where the women were all seated together, their bonnets reminding Adams of "a garden of white cabbage heads." Two days later the peripatetic Congress assembled at Lancaster, deliberated long enough to refer a number of important matters to the Board of War, then adjourned to York—"there to meet on Tuesday next, at ten o'clock." At York, John and Samuel Adams and Elbridge Gerry were invited to stay with General Daniel Roberdeau, a delegate from Pennsylvania, who had a handsome home in the town. It turned out to be a most happy and congenial household. The New Englanders were delighted with the General and his lady and their attractive daughters. There was good food, good company and good talk. The British, John trusted, would rot in Philadelphia while he and Congress prospered in York.[7]

Congress had indeed hardly gotten to work in its new quarters when word came that Burgoyne had surrendered to Gates at Saratoga. This was a balm for all wounds, all defeats and disappointments. What many had almost ceased to hope for had come about—a major British defeat. In fact much more than a defeat, the capitulation of an entire army, British and Hessians, their officers, their baggage and equipment, and their artillery. "The news of Burgoyne's surrender," Adams wrote Warren, "lifted us up to the stars."[8] Not since Trenton had such a thrill of hope and exultation passed through the states. The small force captured in that foray had been Hessian, and the success of the operation had been psychological or symbolic rather than practical. But to meet a major British force and triumph over it was something quite different. It was beside the point that Burgoyne's campaign had been, from the first, an incredible blunder. The British had retrieved blunders before by simple force of arms. Indeed, it had seemed that the British forces were invincible in the field. Now it was possible once more to foresee an end. Hopes sprang up like weeds: the King and his ministers would sue for peace; France and Spain would recognize American independence; Holland would negotiate a loan; the war would be over in six months.

But whatever might or might not happen, one thing was incontestable: British might and power, at least for the moment, lay in the dust. Howe's investing of Philadelphia lost its sting, and patriots everywhere bent to their tasks with fresh determination. The truth is, words are quite unable to convey a sense of the joy and triumph that possessed the American spirit. There were incidental benefits too. Tories lost heart. For Adams, there was special satisfaction in the fact that the surrender was a New England victory. The predominantly Southern troops facing Howe at Philadelphia had been hurled back almost at the moment when the New Englanders, buzzing around Burgoyne like angry hornets, had stung him to surrender.

Congress, when the happy news reached it, appointed a day of "public thanksgiving," and even at Philadelphia there seemed cause for tempered optimism. Washington, having watched Howe march into the City of Brotherly Love, struck suddenly at the Briton's main encampment at Germantown on the outskirts of the city. The Continental soldiers advanced, skirmished and then fought like veterans. For a few breathless moments it seemed as if they might send redcoats flying. Then a morning fog, loss of communication and control, and unexpected resistance by a company of light infantry fighting from the fortresslike Chew mansion, disrupted the American attack and forced a withdrawal. As he had at Brandywine, Nathanael Greene directed an orderly retreat, often more of a test of good discipline and effective leadership than a successful attack. The Germantown battle, defeat though it was, was a most encouraging one. Clearly, Washington had finally created at least the nucleus of an army. He had found generals who could command and soldiers who would obey orders. As Adams wrote Abigail: "One thing is now becoming more and more certain every day: that is that our people will and do fight."[9] Not entirely downcast, Washington pulled his army together at Valley Forge and went into winter quarters. There he was joined by a ruddy, exuberant, boundlessly energetic German drillmaster. Washington had shaped an army; the Baron von Steuben polished it. He put its respective components—squads and companies and battalions—through the kind of intensive close-order drill that Adams had pled for so long. He marched his ragged charges through the cold mire of the parade ground, abusing them good-naturedly in German, correcting, admonishing, exhorting, until they marched like Prussians.

Although Adams was not disposed to blame Washington for the loss of Philadelphia and the Germantown defeat, his friend Benjamin Rush took a very different view of the matter. He was most explicit in condemning the inaction and passivity of the commander-in-chief. Thomas Conway (an Irishman, who was a veteran of the French army), wept for joy, Rush related, when he saw the American soldiers pushing back the British line, but he was indignant at what he considered Washington's ineptitude and lack of enterprise. He had been overheard denouncing the Continental generals as "fools, cowards, and drunkards" but he should still not be allowed to resign. His "bravery and skill" were too badly needed. "Be not deceived, my dear friend," he added. "Our army is no better than it was two years ago."[10] A week later Adams received another excited missive from the emotional Rush. It was clear that the doctor had given up Washington as a hopeless cause. Horatio Gates, in the full tide of his Saratoga victory, was the Philadelphian's candidate for commander-in-chief. Gates's army was an "orderly family," Washington's "an unformed rabble." Conway had written Rush at great length, giving thirteen reasons why the Americans lost at Brandywine, all of which reflected on Washington's leadership.

Rush bombarded Adams with letters enumerating the commanding officer's military sins of omission and commission (mostly the former), and urging that Gates "on the pinnacle of . . . glory," the country saved by his exertions, should replace Washington, "outgeneraled and twice beaten." If the Continental Army under the Virginian had escaped destruction, it was providentially, through "ignorance, idleness, and blunders."[11] In Rush's opinion, the American privates were brave and spirited, and the officers "superior in education and principles to the officers in the British army"; it was the major generals who were responsible for the army's successive defeats. Half of the common soldiers, left to themselves, would have destroyed Howe's army long ago.

Rush failed to convert Adams to the anti-Washington cause, but Adams was equally skeptical of an opposite tendency which seemed to be growing in some quarters to exalt the commander-in-chief to a kind of deity. Highly as he regarded Washington, he was too steeped in the history of Greece and more especially of Rome to view with equanimity a worshipful attitude toward a military leader. The success of Gates in the North and the rebuff of Washington in Pennsylvania, he suggested to Abigail, would nip the temptation, so common to democracies, to pay excessive homage to a warrior. Since republican government put an unprecedented burden on the moral sense of its citizens, there was, as history showed, an inclination in times of stress and crisis to turn toward some comforting figure of authority and consolation—in twentieth-century parlance, what would be termed "a father figure." An unsuccessful Washington, Adams argued at some cost to consistency, was a safe Washington. America could thus allow him to be "wise, virtuous, and good, without thinking him a deity or a savior."[12]

On the twenty-fifth of October, Abigail rode into Boston with Nabby to celebrate the news of Burgoyne's surrender. Although she could not forbear to carp a little at the remarkably generous terms of capitulation, she shared the general joy and relief. The date held special meaning for her. Thirteen years before, she reminded John, they had been married; of those years, three had been sacrificed to her country's good. "May future generations," she wrote, "rise up and call you blessed, and the present behave worthy of the blessings you are laboring to secure them." She could then reconcile herself to her own deprivation.[13]

York was a pleasant enough little community made up chiefly of Germans "who have schools in their own languages, as well as prayers, psalms and sermons, so that multitudes are born, grow up and die here without ever learning English," he wrote Abigail. In politics they were "a breed of mongrels or neutrals, and benumbed with a general torpor." General Roberdeau's spacious house was so crowded with guests and visitors that it was almost impossible for John to find enough quiet and privacy to write. Moreover Congress had received no word directly from Gates as to the terms of Burgoyne's capitulation and there were disturbing rumors that the American General had granted terms so generous as to compromise his great victory. While the delegates waited, "soaking and poaching" in a three-day rain, and Adams confessed himself unable "to bear this suspense with any temper," Congress turned its attention once more to the Articles of Confederation, confident that a few days' debate would see its completion.[14]

Georgia and Delaware were unrepresented and New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and Maryland had only one delegate each. Yet those present pushed on resolutely. Days were spent debating a particular article—say the fourteenth, providing for a means of arbitrating disputes between states—then a resolve passed approving a particular phraseology—and finally, after the issue was apparently settled, some delegate would discover a heretofore unnoticed deficiency in the approved article, generally some fancied threat to the sovereignty of his state, and back the weary members would go to debate the same article once more and ratify or redo their handiwork. Most of the changes made in the Articles as originally submitted were in the direction of strengthening the states at the expense of an already weak Congress, or, as many of the delegates would have put it, defending the liberties of the respective states against the tyranny of a "consolidated government," which in their minds was a kind of monster looming ominously over the states, eager to snatch from them their dearest rights.

Against such a spirit of particularism Adams labored long and hard, but with discouragingly little effect. He had been inclined at first to view the union as, ideally, a loose confederation of states like the Amphictyon Confederation and the Delian League, the Belgic Confederacy or the United Provinces of Holland; but the more thought he gave to the matter, and the more he observed the operations of an ineffectual Congress, the more strongly he came to feel that the general government of the states must embody those principles which he had earlier conceived of as uniquely applicable to the individual states.

If the states needed a balance in government among the three branches—legislative, executive and judicial—and a balance within the legislative of upper and lower houses, why did it not follow that the common government, the national government, binding all the states together, needed just such a balance? The ills of Congress, it was manifested more clearly to Adams with every passing day, stemmed directly from its lack of real authority or, more bluntly, of power. At the same time it was the acquisition of this power that many of the delegates feared and were determined to frustrate. The change in Adams' thinking had been a slow change and he could not have accounted precisely for the various steps by which it came about. It was the result, more than anything else, of his experience in Congress where it became increasingly plain to him and to those delegates whose minds were at least relatively unclouded by the dogmas of state sovereignty that the very loosely united states could not endure for many years if each state was free to go its own way.

Typical was the amendment to the already mentioned Article 14 dealing with controversies between states. The machinery provided by the article was cumbersome in the extreme. Modeled after a parliamentary procedure for deciding disputed elections to the House of Commons, it involved a commission drawn in each instance from all the states. Impractical and unwieldy as it was, some of the delegates were alarmed lest it infringe on the cherished sovereignty of the states.

Suppose two states had a common concern with certain Indian tribes through trade or the purchase of lands. One state (or both) might have passed legislation respecting its relations with the savages. Their conflicting claims, when submitted to the commission, would presumably be decided in favor of one state and against another. Suppose by such a decision the legislative enactment of one state was, in effect, nullified. The sovereignty of the state would clearly be impaired. Its right to decide its own affairs without interference would be imperiled. Freedom and liberty, the dearly won rights for which the Revolution was being fought, would be seriously compromised and the door left open for further infringements by an oppressive national government. A confederated or federated government of states united for certain limited and explicitly stated purposes and in other respects free to go their own way was what most of the delegates envisioned. Their uneasiness was expressed typically in a proposed amendment to Article 14 which stated that in any dispute between states the decision of the commissioners would be final, "provided that the legislative right of any state within its own limits be not infringed or violated."

At the end of October, John Hancock resigned after more than two years as President of Congress, to return to Massachusetts. Perhaps an indication of the divisions that were to plague that body increasingly in the remaining years of the war could be seen in that Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania voted against thanking Hancock "for the unremitted attention and steady impartiality which he has manifested in discharge of the various duties of his office." Henry Laurens of South Carolina succeeded him in the chair as presiding officer and Congress once more took up the debate on the Articles.

On November 3, Colonel James Wilkinson, special courier from Gates, appeared before Congress to deliver the official word of Burgoyne's capitulation, and to offer the General's excuse for the excessively lenient terms of capitulation which he had accepted. Congress received the explanation, the articles of the convention, and related papers, and voted to direct the Board of War to have a gold medal struck off in commemoration of the great event, to be presented by the President of Congress to General Gates.

On the seventh of November, Congress having once more given its attention to the Articles, John and Samuel Adams applied for and received "leave of absence to visit their families." Before they left there was distressing news from the American commissioners in Paris—Franklin, Deane and Lee. Arthur Lee, almost pathologically sensitive and suspicious, had taken a strong aversion to Silas Deane, and with good cause. Deane was apparently trying to mix his own personal business with his duties as agent of Congress. Lee was convinced, moreover, that the Connecticut man had followed a "course of intrigue . . . to traduce Mr. L. and assume to himself all the powers of the commission."[15]

As Adams mounted his horse in the Roberdeau yard, Gerry came out of the house for a final confidential word with him. A number of reports from various sources suggested that Deane was not a faithful servant of Congress. Indeed, his behavior had been a disgrace to him and to his country. He must be recalled, and Adams, friendly to both Lee and Franklin and above partisanship, must replace him. Adams protested vigorously. Congress must do as it would about Deane, but he had no desire to replace him; his ignorance of the language and customs of France made him unqualified for such an important post. At the moment he wanted nothing so much as relief from service to the cause.

The conversation ended inconclusively, and leaving Gerry and Lovell to represent Massachusetts, the Adamses started their wearisome journey north through unseasonably severe weather, "raw, cold, frosty, snowy." With Howe in Philadelphia, and New York likewise in enemy hands, they must, perforce, take a circuitous route. Adams noted in his diary that, as they followed on the heels of Hancock, the tavern-keepers complained bitterly that a guard of light horse which accompanied the retired President did not bother to pay its bills. "Vanity is always mean," he noted; "vanity is never rich enough to be generous."

Of the innumerable taverns at which they stopped, that of Brewster in Orange County, New York, was most congenial. The landlord was a grandson, he told Adams, of one of the early Plymouth settlers. "The manners of this family," John noted approvingly, "are exactly like those of the New England people; a decent grace before and after meat; fine pork and beef, and cabbage and turnip."

At long last Adams was home. "You must expect for the future," he wrote Gerry, "to find in me, situated as I am by a blissful fireside, surrounded by a wife and a parcel of chattering boys and girls, only a dealer in small politics." He meant to decline the next election to Congress and settle down to his law practice. As he later expressed it, "I had been four years in Congress, left my accounts in a very loose condition, my debtors were failing, the paper money was depreciating. I was daily losing the fruits of seventeen years' industry, my family was living on my past acquisitions which were very moderate. . . . My children were growing up without my care in their education, and all my emoluments as a member of Congress for four years had not been sufficient to pay a laboring man upon my farm."[16] The activity of privateers had produced in the adjudication of prizes a number of highly remunerative legal cases; some of Adams' former law students had grown richer in two years than he had in seventeen. When he arrived home he was swamped with applications to argue cases that promised lucrative fees. He had, he felt, earned the right to indulge for a time at least his delight in his family and farm, and to try to obtain for himself a modest portion of the rich harvest that New England maritime enterprise was reaping from the skill and boldness of its seamen.

Soon after his return home he wrenched himself away from the pleasures of Braintree and took an important case before the New Hampshire Court of Admiralty at Portsmouth. His trip to New Hampshire heartened him, for he observed "how deeply rooted our righteous cause is in the minds of the people." When he came to pay his bill at the tavern where he was staying in Portsmouth the landlady would accept nothing. "You are welcome, sir, and I hope you will always make my house your own. And I should be happy to entertain all those gentlemen who have been raised up by Providence to be the saviors of our country." "This was flattering enough to my vain heart," Adams noted, writing to Abigail of the incident.[17]

In Portsmouth he encountered John Langdon, one of the state's delegates and recently home from Congress. Langdon told him that, on the motion of Gouverneur Morris, Adams had been appointed by Congress to replace Deane as third minister to the French court when the court chose to receive them.

While Adams was away the letters containing the notification of his election to the office of minister to France with Franklin and Arthur Lee had arrived at Braintree. A suppression of curiosity was not one of Abigail's virtues. She opened the letters and read them with a sinking heart. France was a whole world away; a vast ocean, full of perils both of nature and of man, would lie between them. All her hopes for a period of domestic delight with her long-absent husband were dashed. He must be off again on the cruelest and most prolonged of all his absences. She had used the time before his return to prepare herself for his going so that he would not be distressed by her tears and unhappiness. She found some comfort in writing General Roberdeau to thank him for his hospitality to her husband. She told him of the arrival of the dispatches and of her conviction that he must answer the call. "Danger and hazard, fear and anxiety will ever be uppermost in my mind," she wrote, adding, "I have made use of his absence to prepare my mind for what I apprehend must take place lest I should unnecessarily embarrass him."[18]

Abigail consoled herself as best she could, writing to Mercy Warren, "Our country is as it were a secondary god, and the first and greatest parent. It is to be preferred to parents, wives, children, friends and all things the gods only excepted." She had been painfully torn in deciding to let John go, since he had placed the decision in her hands. Having waited and longed for his return for so many months, it was almost more than she could bear to give him up so quickly. But when she tried to make up her mind to hold fast to him, she promptly and predictably "found his honor and reputation much dearer to me than my own present pleasure and happiness." If he resigned, a thousand carping voices would be raised to denounce him for not serving his country. A delegate who left Congress after many months of faithful service for a brief visit home inspired "a thousand malicious suggestions and suspicions . . . stories of expulsion from Congress, loss of influence, insults for deserting the cause, and a hundred slurs and slanders." How much more severe the criticism if he failed to accept such an important mission! It was obvious Abigail's concern was most naturally as much for the reputation of her husband as for the glory of her country. But whatever the reasons behind her decision, it was an agonizing one. Her friend Mercy Warren answered her letter with consoling words: "Great advantages," she reminded her, "are often attended with great inconveniences, and great minds called to severe trials." If John had not had the ability to render important services to his country he would not have been called "to the self-denying task of leaving for a time his beloved wife and little prattling brood. Therefore while I weep with my friend the painful absence, I congratulate her that she is . . . connected with a gentleman whose learning, patriotism and prudence qualify him to negotiate at foreign courts the affairs of America at this very critical period."

When Adams got back to Braintree he found that Langdon's report was only too true. Along with his commission were letters urging him to accept and appealing so shrewdly to both his patriotism and his vanity that Adams found it hard to resist. Behind the appointment lay some congressional infighting that would plague the American mission to the end of its term. Deane, despite the reports of his misconduct, had powerful friends in Congress, some of whom were involved with him in business speculations. His alliance with Franklin drew to his side the adherents of the Pennsylvania philosopher and made him less vulnerable to attacks by the supporters of Arthur Lee. Nevertheless, he was pried out, and Adams appointed in his place, making the new appointee a potential target for Deane's friends in Congress.

James Lovell, who served with Richard Lee on the Committee of Foreign Affairs, wrote a personal letter to Adams, urging him to accept the appointment. "Dr. Franklin's age alarms us," he noted. "We want one man of inflexible integrity on that embassy. . . . Great as Brother Gerry's hurry is, he threatens to take his pen in hand because I am not enough urgent with you," Lovell added. "He feels all the callosity of a bachelor," and insists that Congress must have "a strict politician in France."[19] The appeal to his integrity was always hard for Adams to resist. That was his pride, the key which would invariably unlock his reluctance, as his colleagues doubtless knew. A personal letter from Laurens reinforced his official notification and Lee and Lovell, as the Committee on Foreign Affairs, wrote that they were "by no means willing to admit a thought of your declining this important service," and thus without waiting for his formal acceptance were sending on duplicates of his commission.

If the decision was, in a sense, foreordained, it was nonetheless difficult. It was a cruel thought to be separated, for the heavens alone knew how long, from everything that was most precious to him. A winter crossing of the Atlantic was arduous enough. The constant patrolling of American and European waters by British warships was another grave danger; he was inexperienced and untrained as a diplomat; his family was poorly provided for; his departure would place an additional burden on Abigail. They would be separated by six weeks of uncertain sailing and the correspondence which had so sustained them while John was in Congress would be delayed by many months. For a moment Abigail, delicate as she was, seemed determined to try to accompany her husband and carry the children with her. But dearly as John would have wished it the practical obstacles were too great. There would be no one to tend the farm. The passage would be too long and exhausting for Abigail and for the children as well. There was no money to pay for their passage or to maintain them in Paris. The allowance of Congress would cover only Adams' own necessary expense. The idea, so tantalizing to them both, was dropped and it was decided that John Quincy should accompany his father. He was ten years old; in the kind of intellectual hot house provided by his mother's patient but demanding instruction he had matured well beyond his years; he was old enough to profit from the experience of living in a foreign country.

The United States would in the future, as indeed it did in the present, need trained diplomats. To accompany his father might prepare him for a career of service to his country when he reached manhood. So it was decided in family council, with much discussion, many misgivings, and a few unsuppressible tears from Abigail, that John would go and take John Quincy with him. He sent his formal acceptance and wrote Lovell that it had taken "as much philosophy as I am master of to determine to persevere in public life, and to engage in a new scene, for which, I fear, I am very ill qualified." While he had absorbed French grammar and syntax and could read and write a little, he had never "aimed at maintaining or even understanding conversation in it," and he feared that at forty-two he was too old to achieve mastery of sufficient language "for conversation and business." However, he was determined to make the effort. "I will take books," he added, "and my whole time shall be devoted to it."[20]

Once it had been decided that Adams should accept his commission, a thousand things remained to be done before he was due to sail on the new twenty-four-gun frigate, the *Boston,* early in February of 1778. First of all he must have decent clothes and these were outrageously expensive. Shirts were unobtainable and Abigail determined to make him some, but she found to her dismay that good cambric was forty-five dollars a yard and thread was hardly to be gotten at any price. In addition to John's clothing, John Quincy must be decently fitted out and Adams must carry with him supplies, bedding and a considerable quantity of the food that he and his son would consume on the six-week crossing. With inflation so extreme that many people preferred barter to money, the task was made doubly difficult. But Abigail rose to the occasion. She bought and haggled and bartered and worked far into the night to prepare her son and husband for their great adventure; even Nabby turned to in her quietly efficient way as her mother's lieutenant. There was a bushel, bartered for, of Indian meal for frying, for johnny cakes and for hasty pudding; a case of rum, gotten the same way. Hoarded cash had to go for three reams of paper—it would perhaps have been some solace if Abigail had reflected that it was good paper made of honest rags that would last hundreds of years—two account books, one for John to keep a record of his expenditures and the other to use for his diary—and twenty-five quills for his pen. The ink was made at home from powder and water and poured into a stout bottle. Added to the luggage John carried aboard were a dozen clay pipes and two weight of tobacco. In addition, to sweeten the voyage, Abigail had rounded up thirty weight of brown sugar, two bottles of mustard, two weight of tea and chocolate. Although Congress was paying the bill, it was a grief to Abigail to pay such prices as were asked. She was determined, however, to see John and John Quincy sent off as well supplied as was in her power. Besides the inventory of articles that were part of Adams' baggage, there must be an adequate supply of food and drink for the passage. Six chickens were sent on board the *Boston* to be stored in the hold and provide fresh eggs if the chickens did not find their laying cycle disturbed by their watery roost and, far more important, fresh meat; five bushels of corn, and a barrel of apples to help combat the dreaded scurvy; six dozen small barrels of cider—that classic and indispensable New England drink; "2 fat sheep"; a ten-gallon keg of rum; three dozen bottles of madeira wine; thirty bottles of port; fourteen dozen eggs; seven loaves of sugar; a box of wafers; pepper; and more rum. There were two mattresses and bolsters, and finally, under the heading "money in the shoes," various denominations of silver currency totaling some hundred pounds of good hard English money.

The preparations for departure were interrupted briefly by the arrival of General Knox, who came up to Braintree to dine with Adams and to sound him out on a most serious subject. The defeat of Washington at Brandywine and Germantown and the victory of Gates at Saratoga had given impetus to the anti-Washington movement, which, as we have already seen, had found a champion in Benjamin Rush and, since Adams' departure from Yorktown, attracted a number of recruits in Congress, among them, it was rumored, Samuel Adams, and two of the General's fellow Virginians, Francis Lightfoot Lee and Richard Henry Lee. Word in the army was that John Adams was also to be counted among Washington's enemies, and Knox, deeply concerned, had come to sound his friend out. Since Adams was going abroad as the representative of the United States, his view of the commander-in-chief of the Continental Army could have a strong influence on foreign attitudes toward the General and, correspondingly, toward the cause. Adams, although he had been subjected to Rush's suspicions and had himself more than once expressed disappointment at Washington's lack of aggressiveness, replied without hesitation that he thought him "a perfectly honest man, with an amiable and excellent heart, and the most important character at that time among us; for he was the center of our Union." His merits or demerits as a general were less important than the unfaltering resolution with which he had sustained the army and the nation in the darkest hours of adversity; it was his courage, his patience, his unshakable will which made him indispensable. Knox could rest assured that Adams would uphold Washington in the courts of Europe and do so with the best of faith and conscience.

The French officers serving in the American army, hearing of Adams' mission, sent him a pile of letters to be delivered to family and friends in France and provided him, at the same time, with letters commending him to officials who might smooth his path and be of service to him. General Knox brought a letter from the Marquis de Lafayette asking John to carry over a packet of correspondence and informing him that he was taking the liberty of introducing him to his wife, Madame de Lafayette, and the Prince de Poix, a firm friend to America. The Baron de Kalb sent him letters of introduction to Monsieur le Comte de Broglie and one for Monsieur Moreau, the first secretary to Count Vergennes, minister of state on foreign affairs.[21]

Adams was as busy as his wife attending to a multitude of details connected with the farm and with his house in Boston, with his tenant on the farm that he had purchased from his brother, with unfinished odds and ends of legal business, and with his mission. James Lovell wrote to keep him informed of the latest doings of Congress where the mutterings against Washington had been counteracted by a motion to raise sixty thousand more men and make Washington "supreme commander." In his letter Lovell maintained his curious pose as a kind of suitor of Abigail. He had written too amorous an epistle and Abigail had sharply rebuked him. Now he pled with John to "become a reconciling advocate for me with your dear lovely Portia," whom he had offended by indiscreet comments. The truth was the ink—"that black and mischievous liquor"—had betrayed him; he quite frankly loved Abigail and envied her husband, but it had been his last thought to offend her.

Every husband is flattered at finding his wife desirable in the eyes of another man, if the matter goes no further, and John was no exception. He smiled and put the letter aside with no suspicion of its author's motives or his wife's fidelity.

Benjamin Rush wrote to wish him godspeed and noted that while he might lack the advantages "of *dressing, powdering,* and *bowing* well" his integrity and prudence would outweigh all such ambassadorial accomplishments. Rush confessed he was disturbed at the hopes that many Americans had placed upon a declared war between France and Great Britain, as though such a conflict would bring a quick and painless end of the American Revolution. For him it would be "the greatest evil that can befall us. . . . We are," he wrote, "but *half* in love with liberty. We are but *half* taught in the great national arts of government and war on which alone our independence can be maintained and perpetuated to future ages. Our moral and political iniquities are not *half* purged away." With such sentiments Adams quite agreed, but he no longer viewed an open war between the French and English nations as a disaster for the American cause. He knew that the United States needed every advantage that fortune might cast her way if she was to make good her claim to independence.

The doctor renewed his strictures against Washington, writing that he, Rush, was "daily looking out for some *great* military character to start up, perhaps from the plow, to save this country," and implying that Conway or Gates was perhaps the triumphant warrior.[22] Adams rebuked him mildly. Rush called for heroes but overlooked those in his own army. America need not be ashamed of a roster which included Greene, Herkimer, Stark, Arnold, Gates "and many, many others" who had surpassed the trained, professional officers of the enemy in skill and daring. "I don't mean by this," Adams added firmly, "to derogate from the main army or its commander." The battles of Brandywine and Germantown, if coolly examined, would reveal many instances of "both . . . bravery and skill" though they were, it was true, defeats. The deficiencies of the Continental officers were neither bravery nor knowledge but a want of diligence and patience and above all the experience which must teach them to attend more carefully their men, "to their clothes, diet, air, exercise, medicines, arms, accouterments, etc." If such reforms were made Adams would not hesitate to prophesy that there would be, "in another campaign, still greater exertions of heroism and magnanimity." Rush, Adams admonished, must not lay down his own commission. His healing skills and his devotion to the cause were too much needed. "Patience! Patience! Patience," he wrote. "The first, the last and the middle virtue of a politician."[23]

After all the hurry and bustle to prepare for the voyage, the two Johns were ready ten days before the *Boston* dropped anchor off Nantasket Roads to take them abroad. In a way this was the most difficult time of all: to be packed, to have said good-by to friends and relatives and still to wait, day after day. Finally word arrived that the *Boston*, which had been refitted with faster sails, was ready to take the Adamses aboard. John had decided to go with John Quincy to Uncle Norton Quincy's house at Mount Wollaston and have the barge from the *Boston* pick the two of them up at the inlet nearby. The leave-taking with Abigail and the children was a painful one. To the unhappiness of a long separation was added the hazard of the ocean voyage. It tried all of Abigail's fortitude to say good-by to her husband and her precious son, but somehow it was gotten through and father and son along with a servant, Joseph Stevens, rode off to Mount Wollaston.

Captain Samuel Tucker, commander of the *Boston*, met Adams at Norton Quincy's. Tucker was a Marblehead man, one of the most promising young officers in the young navy, already a veteran of several dramatic clashes with British vessels. After lunch Adams wrote a hasty note to Abigail, assuring her that Johnny was behaving like a man, and then with Tucker he walked down to Hough's Neck in the bay to board the *Boston's* barge. It was a cold, blustery, winter day with high seas and a sharp wind that drove the spray like hail; Adams feared a wetting but Tucker had brought greatcoats which he threw over the two passengers and brought them dry to the frigate. On the way to the landing the little party stopped at Seth Spear's house to pick up the sailors manning the barge who had stopped there for warmth and refreshment. Spear's wife was a distant cousin of John Adams, a gaunt, strange creature half out of her wits. Informed of the voyage, she gazed wildly at the little group and predicted that there would be a terrible storm during the crossing. She could see many threatening signs. "The heavens frown, the clouds roll, the hollow winds howl, the wavers roar," she intoned, while her audience glanced uneasily at her and one another. The prediction was certainly not a very comforting one to John, whose experience of the ocean was limited to fishing trips to Cohasset and shooting forays on Half Moon Island.

XXV

On board the *Boston* the two Adamses, father and son, were introduced by Tucker to the other passengers: a young Princeton graduate, William Vernon, Jr., son of a member of the Navy Board; and Master Jesse Deane, the son of Commissioner Silas Deane whom Adams was going to replace, a boy a year or so older than Johnny. The cabin was a comfortable one, equipped and provisioned with familiar articles—John's own mattresses and bolsters, sheets and blankets. Father and son thus "lay very comfortable, and slept well," warm and snug through a violent wind storm that wailed through the rigging and rattled the yards.

Adams was hardly settled in before he received letters requesting him to take Jesse Deane and young Vernon under his care. Jesse's uncle wrote asking that Adams be "a friendly monitor" to his nephew and "keep him from associating with the common hands on board." The elder William Vernon, for his part, solicited Adams' help in securing his son a position with a mercantile house at Nantes or Bordeaux. Adams was pleased with his commissions. "This benevolent office is peculiarly agreeable to my temper," he wrote in his diary. "Few things have ever given me greater pleasure than the tuition of youth to the bar."[1]

The first morning aboard ship was fine and clear and cold; father and son, as they stood at the ship's rail looking from a new perspective at the well-known shore and identifying the promontories and indentations of the coast line, felt the uncommunicable excitement and strangeness of an ocean voyage. Adams with his zest for new experiences was in the middle of everything, observing all the details of handling the ship, asking a thousand questions, engaging a sailor in conversation about the firing of a cannon, and inquiring of Nicolas Noël, a French surgeon, the best method of mastering English.

At daybreak the *Boston* upped anchor and sailed north to Marblehead. There friends came aboard to see Adams and the sailors took shore leave to visit families and sweethearts. Captain Joseph Stephens, master of a privateer, came on board to present John with a handsome pistol, a prize taken from a captured British vessel. At Marblehead, it was Tucker's intention to take on some additional crew and sail with the first favorable wind. But the wind, bearing a heavy snow, came from the northeast. "Our excursion to this place was unfortunate," the impatient Adams wrote, "because it is almost impossible to keep the men on board; mothers, wives, sisters come on board and beg for leave for their sons, husbands and brothers, to go on shore for one hour," and it was hard for Tucker, a Marblehead man himself, to resist their importunings. After he had let a half dozen men go ashore the wind swung round to the north. Tucker fired a cannon to recall the missing crewmen, but they did not return and he had to go ashore after them. By that time the wind had shifted again and their departure was once more postponed. The captain's problem, in part, was that of every American officer, naval or military—his men were poorly trained and poorly disciplined. Adams noted that neither the sailors nor the marines gave evidence of good order: "The men are not exercised to the guns; they hardly know the ropes."[2]

Beside Dr. Noël, there were two other Frenchmen on board, a Captain "Pondicherry" Parison and Begard, a lieutenant of artillery. They took an immediate fancy to Johnny, so quick and handsome and bright and so ready to learn, and the three men combined to teach him French. Father and son labored together and whenever they got stuck Dr. Nicolas Noël was consulted in order to learn "the precise, critical pronunciation of all the French words, syllables and letters."

Adams was pleased with Captain Tucker, "a brave, active, vigilant officer," but he examined the sailor's small library quite critically and concluded from it and from his conversation that he had "no great erudition." Tucker, as he expressed it later, "did not say much to him [Adams] at first . . . but blast my eyes and damn my soul, I found him after a while as sociable as any Marblehead man." When the Captain's "tarry" comment was relayed to him, Adams was delighted.

Tuesday, February 17, at sunset after four days in Marblehead Harbor, the *Boston* caught a favorable wind and put to sea. The general pleasure at being at last under way was diluted by the fact that everyone was promptly seasick—Johnny and Jesse, Adams himself, and Stevens, the servant—made so by the motion of the vessel and "the smoke, the smell of sea coal, the smell of stagnant, putrid water, the smell of the ship where the sailors lie."

The next day came the first excitement of the voyage. From the crow's-nest the lookout sighted three large ships. They were, in all likelihood, British frigates cruising to pick up the *Boston*. Tory intelligence was good enough so that the British doubtless knew of Adams' mission as well as the port, the ship and the approximate date of sailing. Tucker was uncertain of the frigate's sailing qualities; he had commanded the

Boston before, but she had been largely refitted and had many new crew members, so that it remained to be seen how she would sail and fight. Nonetheless, he bore his ship to the north and gave chase to the three vessels. As he gained on them he saw that one was a twenty-four-gun frigate, the other twenty guns, and the third too far off to judge. At that point the lookout sighted a fourth ship and it now seemed expedient to run. There was a brief council of war with Adams as a councilor and prudence was wisely preferred to valor. The *Boston* turned and ran, pursued by two of the ships. Adams and the two boys were fascinated spectators as one of the ships alternately gained on them and then fell astern throughout the afternoon.

At dawn all three were on deck at first light, but the ocean was clear. Then once more the sails of their pursuer appeared on the horizon and again the *Boston* ran. Tucker considered standing to and engaging but the thought of his undermanned ship and poorly trained crew deterred him, so the chase went on until the wind fell at sundown. Now they might have to fight whether they wished to or not. The frigate lay becalmed, pitching and rolling on the swells, the sails flapping, filling with a brief gust and falling again. The guns were loaded and run out, powder and balls were placed beside them, the marines took their battle stations; the whole ship was a stir and bustle of activity. Tubs were filled with water to quench fires; Dr. Noel laid out his surgical instruments and bandages.

Tucker's orders were, first, to carry the Honorable John Adams to France; secondly, to take whatever prizes he might encounter on the way; and thirdly, not to fight unless forced to. But the chase had aroused all of Adams' combative instincts. He was ready for battle and crimson with excitement he addressed the crew, exhorting them to fight to the last man for the cause of liberty. He would prefer to lie on the bottom of the ocean rather than be taken prisoner by the British. Having delivered his exhortation, he took up a post in his cabin and through the stern windows watched the British ship approach, driven by a breeze that by-passed the *Boston*. Just as an engagement seemed unavoidable, the skies began to darken, the wind freshened and the *Boston* started to move as night came on.

The respite was a brief one. In place of a threatening enemy, the ship faced threatening elements. They were in the Gulf Stream when the storm struck. For three days the frigate was slammed about like a chip. It was impossible to stand upright or, indeed, to lie below without being tossed and battered. Everything not securely anchored broke loose and crashed about below decks—chests, casks, bottles, tables. Cabins, bedding, clothes and food were soaked with salt water. The main topmast was struck by lightning, three sailors were struck by the same shaft and twenty-three men injured by falling rigging. For three days the crew and passengers lived in chaos, catching snatches of sleep and gulping down cold meals. The prophecy of Molly Spear was amply fulfilled. It seemed that the frigate might bury its bow any moment in the heading sea and be lost forever.

It was all a new experience and Adams savored it to the full; his principal regret indeed was that the storm was too violent for him to try to record it. He wished to keep "a minute journal of all that passed," but he was so wet, "and everything and place was so wet, every table and chair was so wrecked, that it was impossible to touch a pen, or paper."[3] In the same spirit he was also interested in his own reactions. There was no question but that the ship was in danger of being wrecked, yet he noted with satisfaction "that I was myself perfectly calm." Even more gratifying was his son's behavior. Johnny never showed the strain and fear that he must have felt at the height of the tempest. Throughout the storm Adams was constantly noting the strengths and weaknesses of the ship. She carried, he thought, too many and too heavy guns for her tonnage. Since there was the threat of attack from her pursuer if the storm abated, she had to run with her guns out, which made her more difficult to handle and more vulnerable to the heavy seas which swept over her, rolling in and out of her ports and scuppers.

Finally, after scudding before the wind in short sail three days, the crew half dead from weariness, the ship tried in every beam and brace, the *Boston* sailed onto a moderate sea and Captain Tucker was able to write tersely: "Made sail, and began to repair the rigging."

With the storm over, Adams resumed his inspection of the *Boston*. "There is the same inattention," he noted disapprovingly, "to the cleanliness of the ship, and the persons and health of the sailors, as there is at land to the cleanliness of the camp, and the health and cleanliness of the soldiers." The practice of "profane swearing" especially distressed Adams. It was "indulged and connived at by officers, and practiced, too, in such a manner that there is no kind of check against it." There would never be good order, in his opinion, until cursing was suppressed. Adams found another source of bad discipline in the irregularity of meals. As it stood, the cook fed the crew when he felt inclined; the meals were usually unpredictable and invariably bad.

Of course Adams was not inclined to keep his criticisms, most of which were excellent ones, to himself. He bombarded the harassed captain with suggestions "concerning order, economy and regularity." In response to Adams' nudgings, Tucker cleared out the ship between decks, brought up the hammocks to be cleaned, had the sick carried on deck for a whiff of fresh air, and undertook to "wash, sweep, air and purify clothes, cots, cabins, hammocks, and all other things, places and persons." Finally, again at John's urging, he descended into the crew's quarters—"that sink of devastation and putrefaction"—Adams called it, and ordered that hole cleaned and aired.

Once the ship had been put in order to his satisfaction, Adams turned to his French studies—to a geography of France lent him by Dr. Noel, and to the wonders of the deep. The captain and officers, pleased at his curiosity, answered his questions as best they could and exhibited for him what flora and fauna could be dredged out of the sea. He noted the bonito and porpoises playing about the ship and was fascinated by a Portuguese man-of-war with his curious sail like blue glass and "something like guts" hanging down. "I pierced it with the sharp point of my penknife," he noted, "and found it empty. The air came out, and the thing shrunk up almost to nothing." He was intrigued by the superstition of the sailors, who declared that since the ship had had such bad luck there must be a woman aboard.

There was also the compelling mystery of the Gulf Stream. Like many sailors before and after him, he speculated on its course and its character. How deep? How wide? To what point did it flow? The officers found they could never satisfy the insatiable curiosity of the rotund, inquisitive little man who knew more about how to run a ship than its captain, and wished to know more about the ocean than those who spent their life on its dangerous bosom.

So they sailed on through successive days, some fine, some blustery, up the treacherous Gulf Stream to northern waters where the ocean turned from green to dazzling, unfathomable blue and flocks of sea gulls and marine birds told them that they were off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, the heartland of New England's fishing economy. They were two weeks out of Marblehead and not yet clear of North American waters; seasickness robbed life of every charm. "The life I lead is a dull scene to me," John wrote in his diary; "no business, no pleasure, no study. Our little world is all wet and damp. There is nothing I can eat or drink without nauseating. We have no spirits for conversation, nor anything to converse about." From his chair on deck, miserable and swathed in coats and blankets, he could see nothing but a swinging, stomach-churning view of "sky, clouds and sea, and then sea, clouds and sky." He lost interest even in French, but two days later with "a soft, clear, warm air, a fair sun, no sea," his spirits revived, and he reviewed Johnny's inventory of the ship's sails. The captain had put Johnny to work on the points of the compass; he would soon be an able-bodied seaman.

The *Boston* ran well and they made good time, nine and ten knots through easy seas, "prosperous wind and beautiful weather." Adams occupied himself with poring over his geography, making up a plan of campaign for his diplomatic mission, and reading Molière's *Amphitryon*. The tedium was relieved by the hazing of the new sailors. Jerry, the boatswain's mate, with his fellow veterans built a galley and persuaded the raw hands, some twenty-five in number, to take seats therein and allow themselves to be bound together by their legs. When they were securely tied, the mate gave a signal and his accomplices began to haul up buckets of icy water which were poured over the trapped sailors to the delight of their tormentors. "The behavior of the gulled," Adams noted, "their passions, and speeches, and actions, were diverting enough." The crew was mustered, had the articles of war read to them, took battle stations, and went through gun drill. Then the captain ordered a dance on the main deck and all hands, boys, Negroes and sailors, leaped and gyrated, after which the old sailors held "a miller"—a jape which ended with everyone soaked to the skin and covered with flour. "These whimsical diversions" Adams watched with little sympathy. "There is not in them," he observed, "the least ray of elegance, very little wit, and a humor of the coarsest kind." On Sundays the captain ordered all hands upon the quarterdeck for prayers. "The officers and men all attended in clean clothes and behaved very soberly," Adams noted approvingly.

Four weeks out of Marblehead, the lookout on the *Boston* sighted a sail. Captain Tucker asked Adams' permission to give chase and, crowding on all possible canvas, took off in pursuit. After a few hours the *Boston* came up with the vessel, which turned out to be a British privateer of fourteen guns. Adams, who had been ordered below by Tucker, had secured a musket from a marine and stationed himself on the quarterdeck. The British ship fired on the *Boston* before her captain saw the American's armament and the ball sailed over Adams' head and split the mizzen yard. The instant the *Boston* turned broadside and the British saw her more formidable array of cannon, the captain struck her colors.

The prize was a rich one, the *Martha* out of London for British-held New York. Tucker put his third lieutenant with a prize crew aboard, directed the vessel for Boston or an adjacent port, and resumed his course. The captain and most of the British sailors on the *Martha* were taken aboard the *Boston* and placed in rather informal confinement. There they were a constant irritation to the Americans, making very "invidious remarks upon our officers and men and their awkward conduct of the ship." The *Boston*, some of the prisoners declared, would never hold its own against a British warship of half its size, and McIntosh, the *Martha's* Captain, was so hostile to the American cause that Adams, trying to correct the Englishman's errors and misconceptions, found him rather too inflammable to talk to.

A few hours after the capture of the *Martha*, the *Boston* chased and came up with another vessel which turned out to be a French "snow" out of Bordeaux. They saw and chased another sail which proved also to be French, but when Lieutenant Barron tried to fire a cannon to signal the brig to come about, the piece burst and shattered his leg. It was obvious that the leg must be amputated. Barron was carried below and Dr. Noel severed the mangled limb while Adams held the officer in his arms. Barron's thoughts were with his family, his wife and child who had no other source of support. He begged that if he died as a result of his wound Adams would help make some provision for them. Barron lived for a week, delirious and racked with pain, and when he died he was nailed into a chest, a fragment of the exploded gun lashed to it, "and the whole launched overboard through one of the ports, in the presence of all the ship's crew."

Once in European waters any number of sails were sighted, several apparently British cruisers, which the *Boston,* with the aid of another violent storm, evaded. The voyage thus approached its end as it had begun with winds that threatened to tear sails from their yards and wrench the masts from their sockets. Adams noted, when the storm subsided, that for days he had not been able to stand or sit "without holding fast with both my hands upon some lashed table, some lashed gun, the side or beams of the ship, or some other fixed object."

A few nights later two large British ships bore down on the *Boston.* The Captain of the *Martha,* hearing of their approach, went to Adams' cabin to inform him that in a few minutes the American vessel would be captured. "You will hear from them, I warrant you, in six minutes. Let me take the liberty to say to you that I feel for you more than for anyone else. I have always liked you since I came on board. . . . You may depend upon it, all the good service I can render you with my countrymen shall be done with pleasure."

Adams bowed and smiled and then hurried on deck. There, in the bright moonlight, not half a mile distant, snowy and majestic, were two large British men-of-war. It was an eerie moment. On the *Boston,* riding without lights, sailors and marines hurried to their battle stations, knowing very well that their ship would have no chance in an engagement. The creak and groan of tackle, the rumble of gun carriages drawn into position, the muffled commands of officers and gun captains were the only sounds on the *Boston.* Tucker was on the quarterdeck, staring anxiously across the water, when Adams joined him. They held a brief council of war. Certainly nothing was to be gained and possibly a great deal to be lost by challenging the British ships. It was decided to slip away as quickly as possible and soon the three ships, sailing in opposite directions, had drawn away from each other in the night. Why the British men-of-war had sailed silently by no one could guess; it was enough to be grateful for a very narrow escape.

Monday, March 23, after more than five weeks at sea, the *Boston* made land on the coast of Spain near the port of St. Antonio. Through a spyglass Adams and Johnny surveyed the shore—the lush vegetation and the snow-capped mountains made a charming picture but before they could make anchor and go ashore the wind caught the ship and they were obliged to put out to sea. The captain decided to continue his course for Bordeaux but first a calm and then opposing winds kept them drifting and tacking futilely, scarcely thirty miles from the French port. In this strained atmosphere, the French barber tried to go below against orders and a marine guard cut off his big toe with a cutlass. The barber's passionate flow of French aroused the French officers on board and there was a sudden eruption of Gallic emotion that threatened to add more blood to that which had flowed, quite spectacularly indeed, from the severed member. But Tucker restored order and good humor, the barber's fault was acknowledged and the justice, if not the severity, of the action admitted.

Finally, in this tedious way they reached the harbor of Rochelle and sighted the Tower of Cordouan, the Bordeaux lighthouse, looking out over the tidal flats. Still the ship dawdled, yawed, filled, fell away, while everyone grew more and more impatient to reach port. A passenger relieved the monotony by playing his fiddle while the sailors danced, which seemed to restore spirits and good humor on board. Sunday the wind freshened; they made way, picked up a pilot who told them that France had declared war against England four days ago, and steered into the harbor. The pilot pointed to the flags flying in the port and at the lighthouse as confirmation of the declaration of war.

The next day they were again becalmed and drifted for hours in sight of the village of St. Denis, a seaport town surrounded by sand dunes and windmills. The bay was covered with the sails of French, Spanish and Dutch vessels, and Captain Tucker improved the time by having the ship cleaned, the guns run inboard, and everything put in order to drop anchor. When the wind rose the French pilot brought the ship into the river where the *Boston* anchored and the crew bought fresh hakes and skates from a fisherman who came alongside.[4]

The riverbanks presented a classic French pastoral scene—neat, rich farms with horses, oxen, cows and great flocks of sheep grazing, the farmers doing their spring plowing, while droves of women worked their hoes. "The churches, convents, gentlemen's seats and villages appear very magnificent," Adams noted. It was a scene in sharp contrast to the raw, rough land of his native New England. Here the patient and devoted husbandry of centuries had produced a garden of abundance, lovingly tended and bountifully rewarding. The houses, the villages, the country mansions were rich with the patina of age, sanctified by the many lives lived within their comforting forms. Not for the last time, Adams felt, keen as knife thrust, nostalgia for a world that he had never known, a world of settled order and harmony and, above all, beauty. The great trees on country estates spoke of centuries, the thick, cropped hedgerows divided the countryside into a tidy, glowing patchwork of fields and pastures. In New England, careless husbandry must squeeze what thin fare it could from a stony and unrelenting soil. Here nature, tamed and subdued, yielded up its fairest fruits with the grace of a bountiful mistress. Suddenly Adams felt acutely what he in truth was, a provincial politician from a rough and remote frontier, awed, fascinated and ill at ease in a land whose history brooded over it, an almost palpable presence. The chieftains of the German tribes had perhaps had similar feelings when they stood on the hills overlooking Rome; Alexander's rough Macedonian captains gazing at the towers of Persian Darius; the crusaders at the gates of Constantinople.

The long, weary trip was over, or at least its ocean leg, and here, spread out before him, lay an entrance to the Old World, the world out of whose womb his own nation was struggling to birth, the world which he was in a sense denying, the world of such richness and complexity and wonder as almost stopped his heart's beat. How could the New World ever free itself from this ancient, assured, complacent Old World, this vast, remarkable, astonishing gallery of the human spirit with its palaces, paintings, statues; with its music, public buildings, cathedrals, castles, châteaux, walled cities, Roman roads, and market towns? Adams lived in an age which had a greater appreciation of the grandeur and variety of the universe, natural and man-made, than that of perhaps any earlier time, an age at least more self-conscious, more articulate and more sentimental. He and John Quincy stood for hours at the ship's rail as the *Boston* glided up the broad river and the extraordinary tapestry of the countryside unrolled before them. "The pleasure resulting from the sight of land, cattle, houses, etc., after so long, so tedious and dangerous a voyage, is very great," Adams wrote in his diary. "It gives me a pleasing melancholy to see this country; an honor which a few months ago I never expected to arrive at. Europe, the great theater of arts, sciences, commerce, war!" he exclaimed. "Am I at last permitted to visit thy territories?" But he had little time for dreaming. He must inquire as soon as he reached Bordeaux who the American agent was, who the principal merchants concerned in the American trade were. What vessels, French or American, were sailing for the United States and with what cargoes?[5]

While they lay anchored in the river, the captain of a French ship lying nearby, the *Julie* bound for St. Dominique, paid the *Boston* a visit and invited the Americans to dinner. Adams went with Johnny, Jesse Deane and Dr. Noel. The French vessel was a marvel of neatness and elegance after the American frigate. The little party sat down to a table laid with white stoneware plates, napkins and handsome silver. "The cloth, plates, servants, everything was so clean as in any gentleman's house." The meal was as elegant as the settings. There was a fine French soup to begin with, then boiled meat, followed by calf's liver and roasted mutton; then fricasseed mutton, a fine salad, and "something very like asparagus." For dessert there were prunes, almonds, "and the most delicate raisins I ever saw," Dutch cheese, a "dish of coffee," a French cordial, wine and water, and, of course, an excellent claret with dinner.

This was the way the French lived on land or sea. Adams, committed as he was to democratic simplicity, could not help but admire such a civilization. After they had returned, stuffed with good food and light-headed with good wines, to the *Boston,* Adams noted that the hens, capons and cocks brought aboard by a French pinnace, and stacked on the quarterdeck in coops, were magnificent creatures, the largest he had ever seen.

From the commander of the port came entry papers and passes to Bordeaux. Captain Tucker saluted the fort with thirteen guns, and Adams found an opportunity to talk with an English-speaking Frenchman, Monsieur J. C. Champagne, a merchant of wines and champagnes, who came aboard to pay his respects. The next day Vernon, Jesse Deane, Adams, Johnny, and Adams' servant, Joseph Stevens, took leave of the *Boston,* Captain Tucker and his officers, and went by the ship's pinnace to the city where they strolled about all morning seeing the sights and then dined with American merchants on fish and beans and salad and claret, champagne and mountain wine. After lunch John Bondfield, the agent of Congress in Bordeaux, took John to his lodgings where they had tea and then walked about the town, stopping to see the new Comédie and then going on to the opera, "where the scenery, the dancing, the music, afforded to me," John wrote, "a very cheerful, sprightly amusement, having never seen anything of the kind before." Adams found himself, in fact, somewhat of a lion. With Bondfield and Johnny and Jesse, he visited the post office, shipyards, the custom-house, the Chamber of Commerce and the Parliament of Bordeaux. There the President of the Parliament greeted him with an effusiveness and affection that were most disconcerting to the stiff New Englander. He had long heard of Adams, he declared, cherished him as a friend of mankind and a champion of liberty, and feared for his safety; he begged permission to embrace him. John, immensely flattered to find himself famous in this ancient land, endured the kisses, crimson with pleasure and embarrassment; young Johnny came in for his share of the torrent of good wishes and compliments which Mr. Bondfield patiently translated. He, Monsieur le Président, had suffered himself in the cause of liberty by being banished in the time of Louis XV for joining in the remonstrance of Malesherbes against "the arbitrary conduct and pernicious edicts of the court." Adams thought that the flow of language would never end. It was all rather awkward, this emotionalism, this fulsomeness that John, with his reserve, reacted instinctively against. But later, considering it more calmly, he concluded that, "upon the whole, there was a form of sincerity in it, decorated and almost suffocated with French compliments."

The days that followed were a dizzy social whirl at whose vortex stood the sturdy figure of the congressional commissioner. "Went to the coffee-house," he noted; "went to the Comédie, saw *Les deux avares.* Supped at Messrs. Reculès de Basmarein, and Raimbaux." At Monsieur de Basmarein's there was a glittering company: Count de Virelade, son of the Premier President; Le Moine, first Commissary of the Navy, and a dozen of the first merchants of the city. After a lavish dinner the toasts were introduced by thirteen shots in honor of the thirteen states, and twenty-one for the King of France; thirteen for Congress; three for Washington; three for Marshall de Broglie; three for General Gates; and so on through a rather lengthy roster of French and Continental officers; three to the prosperity of France; three to eternal concord between the two nations, friends and allies; three to the state of Massachusetts and three to its representative, Monsieur Adams. In addition Monsieur de Basmarein's beautiful formal gardens were decorated with a large illuminated inscription, "God save the Congress, Liberty and Adams."[6] It was all a little bewildering. John felt like a prophet who, if not entirely without honor in his own land, had to journey abroad to be fully appreciated. Such a reception and such honors were intoxicating in more ways than one.

Here were the French, loyal subjects of a monarch whose power was exercised with few if any of the constitutional limitations Adams considered necessary to a free and just government, making a great clamor over a revolution of whose character and principles they could have only the vaguest notion. Here were aristocrats and wealthy merchants applauding an uprising made in the name of republican principles and democratic simplicity. Adams had armored himself against Gallic cunning and duplicity. Congenitally suspicious of human motives, he was prepared to encounter ministers of the Crown, bent, naturally enough, upon using America's struggle for independence to advance the interests of France. He was prepared to endure the scorn of the lordly and sophisticated for a simple, or comparatively simple, American, a farmer and a country lawyer, cast among them to make his way by native wit and shrewdness and, above all, by unshakable integrity which must in the end triumph over corruption and deceit. But this celebration of himself and his cause was startling and unnerving and delightful. He asked a question, and, after Bondfield's translation, everyone hastened to answer. He spoke and the company fell silent, listening attentively to his words as they filtered through the rather clumsy French of the American agent.

Feeling an unfamiliar sensation of giddiness, he tried to collect himself as he mounted his coach and rode off to the accompaniment of a final salute of thirteen guns. This was certainly a better way to fight a revolution than contending sixteen hours a day with the jealousies, factions, hesitations and timidities of Continental Congress.

At his lodgings he wrote Patrick Henry: "You would be flattered with the attention that is shown our states and with the high eulogiums that are everywhere bestowed by learned and ingenious men upon our constitutions, our laws, our wisdom, valor and universal virtue." Partial as Adams was to his native land, and dearly as he loved it, he could not help but feel that the praises and acclaim went somewhat beyond the bounds of truth or reason, that the philosophers of France, as he put it, "do us rather more honor than we deserve. . . . But," he added, "we are combatants for liberty, and it is a fashionable saying in this country that every man who combats for liberty is adorable." The liberal spirit in France increased every day and would, Adams predicted, continue to increase.[7]

Flattered as he was to be hailed everywhere, it dawned on John belatedly that he was often confused with his more renowned cousin. He realized when he was greeted with *"Le fameux Adams? Ah, le fameux Adams. C'est un homme célèbre. Votre nom est bien connu ici,"* the reference was generally to Sam, and he was forced to protest that he was John, not Samuel Adams, but his protests were in vain. His French was too imperfect and his hosts too determined to believe that they had in their midst *"le fameux Adams . . . le célèbre membre du Congrès."* They ascribed his denials to an excess of modesty. *"Oh no, monsieur, c'est votre modestie,"* they exclaimed. It was irksome to be constantly wrapped in the mantle of his better-known kinsman, especially since John was well aware of the rather considerable areas in which he excelled Samuel. To further confuse the issue, a carefully expurgated edition of *Common Sense* which omitted all unfavorable references to monarchy had recently been published in France and attributed to John's Boston namesake, so John found himself a kind of curious amalgam of Tom Paine and Samuel Adams.

When Adams later arrived in Paris, the matter of his identity was approached, as might be expected, more logically, more scientifically, one might say. Was he or was he not *"le fameux Adams?"* His own testimony was waved aside. It was clearly established on the basis of informed and unprejudiced testimony that there were, indeed, two Adamses. Their respective claims to be *"le fameux Adams"* were examined as before a court of law and the controversy even spread across the Channel where the English newspapers took up the question and pronounced a judgment —John was not the famous Adams. Nor was he, exactly, an impostor. He was simply a lesser Adams, "some man that nobody had ever heard of before, and therefore a man of no consequence—a cipher." "I am inclined to think," John wrote wryly, "that all parties, both in France and England —Whigs and Tories in England, the friends of Franklin, Deane, and Lee, in France, differing in many other things, agreed in this—that I was not the famous Adams . . . that I was a man of whom nobody had ever heard before, a perfect cipher, a man who did not understand a word of French; awkward in his figure—awkward in his dress—no abilities—a perfect bigot—and fanatic."[8]

XXVI

ADAMS' pleasure in the Bordeaux festivities was clouded by Bondfield's story of dissension among the American commissioners in Paris. The animosity was, he was given to understand, "very rancorous," and Americans in Paris, as well as French friends of the American cause, had chosen sides in the dispute with unfortunate consequences for the United States. It was unseemly and intolerable that in the midst of a struggle for its very existence the position of Congress should be compromised by a bitter split among its agents. Worse still, of course, was the fact that Congress was itself divided along factional lines. The gloomy prospect that lay before him sobered Adams and took the edge off his enthusiastic reception. Dinners and toasts, salutes and illuminated mottoes, pleasant as they were, would accomplish very little when placed beside the hard realities of diplomatic negotiation and power politics. They would not reconcile Lee to Deane or Franklin to Lee. Adams was acutely aware of the delicateness of his own position. Each party would seek to recruit him. An effort to remain neutral would stir the resentment of both. "I am determined to be cautious and impartial," he wrote, "knowing, however, very well the difficulty and danger of acting an honest and upright part in all such situations."

After three dizzy days of wining and dining Adams began his long overland journey to Paris. The coach went through the spring countryside—through the narrow streets of Poitiers, scene of the famous battle, surrounded by "exquisite" cultivation, through Châtellerault where, when they stopped to change horses, twenty young women peddling elegant knives, scissors and toothpicks clustered around the coach; on to Les Ormes, the seat of the Marquis d'Argenson. As they rode along Adams noted what American travelers would never fail to comment on—the contrast between wealth and luxury on the one hand and abject poverty on the other. "The fields of grain, the vineyards, the castles, the cities, the parks, the gardens, everything is beautiful, yet every place swarms with beggars."[1]

This was the clue, the heart of the difference between his own unfinished land and this carefully tended, gardenlike world. One was oriented toward things, costly fabrics, inlaid cabinets, crenellated towers and worn stones, marble and stained glass, a dazzling, marvelous profusion of things. The other, the raw, unpolished, crude, unadorned land, was oriented toward people, toward their human form and potentiality, toward their full dignity, their freedom, their rights, their uniqueness in the eyes of God. Adams, committed as he was to the one, loved and respected the other because, through the beautiful things, it spoke directly and eloquently of the power of the human spirit; it fed the soul, extended the understanding, increased the humanity. One day his beloved America should have such riches, such gorgeous things, not instead of but added to its own special gifts, which the world needed quite as much as it needed the glory of things.

They went from Les Ormes to Mer, John and Jesse Deane and John Quincy, Adams pointing out the famous spots, the sites of battles, the châteaux of great lords, the seats of powerful bishops, weaving a tapestry of history into the rich fabric of the country for his two young traveling companions. Past Tours, they rode on a causeway in the river Loire for many miles, amid beauty that made John's heart ache and made him long for Abigail to share it with him.

Four days after their departure from Bordeaux they reached Paris, sometimes making a hundred miles a day over the excellent highways. It seemed extraordinary to have such a rapid system of transportation. In America a journey of equal length would have taken weeks over axle-breaking roads. After trying two or three hotels in the city, they found temporary accommodations at the Hôtel de Valois, Rue de Richlieu, where Adams engaged a whole richly furnished floor for two crowns a day and sent out, as the custom was, for food. "This morning the bells and carriages and various cries in the city make noise enough," he noted.

Once again Adams was the focus of attention, caught up in a round of parties and lavish dinners. As soon as he had unpacked he rode out to Passy, where the American commissioners had their headquarters, and met Franklin and Lee. The Americans were dining with Monsieur Turgot, the great French Minister of Finance, economist, statesman, and voice of the enlightened spirit of the age. Turgot extended an invitation to Adams to join the party, and he sat down at his first meal among the "great people of France." There were dukes and duchesses, counts, princes and barons in too great an abundance to keep track of. The Duchess d'Enville, mother of the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, Adams found to be an especially agreeable dinner companion with a "bold, masculine and original" mind that reminded him of Abigail.

As for the house and grounds, they were magnificent beyond Adams' power of description—the gardens, library, furniture, and the table.

Adams, so recently arrived from America, found himself the center of interest. Even the great Turgot, "grave, sensible and amiable," paid flattering attention to his account of Continental affairs. Adams replied to all questions as clearly and precisely as he could and was satisfied at the end of the meal that he had come off "for the first time . . . well enough."

After the lavish lunch Adams returned to Franklin's house and the two men supped simply enough on cheese and beer. Franklin was put out, he confessed, with Arthur Lee. Lee was rude and peremptory in conversation, suspicious and evasive in his behavior. Adams had to listen to the doctor's recital of the Deane-Lee controversy. It was plain that Franklin's sympathies were with Deane. He described Lee as a man of an anxious, "uneasy temper . . . one of those men . . . who went through life quarreling with one person or another till they commonly ended with the loss of their reason." Against Ralph Izard, appointed by Congress to be minister to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Franklin had further complaints. Izard, who had made common cause with Lee, was himself "a man of violent and ungoverned passions." Instead of going to his post in Tuscany, he had remained in Paris with his wife and children, and instead of minding his own business, he spent his time in consultations with Lee, "exciting disputes and propagating stories," many of them directed at Franklin. Lee and Izard had made strong objections to several articles of the recently concluded French treaty. Neither man was popular with the French and they combined to make Franklin's own service difficult and unpleasant.

Adams listened to the recitation of grievances without surprise but with a sinking heart. It was an inauspicious beginning to his mission. From his early youth he had admired the Pennsylvania scientist. He was America's most famous citizen, a kind of ambassador at large to the world, admired and venerated and taken as the very image of the new United States. Adams had been closely associated with Franklin in Continental Congress and he had decided there that the doctor was far more gifted as a natural and moral than as a political philosopher. In the latter respect, his ideas seemed to Adams to be often naïve and uninformed, but of his good heart and devotion to the cause of liberty there was no question.

After their conversation Franklin conducted Adams through Silas Deane's quarters, "which were every way," John wrote, "more elegant than I desired, and comfortable and convenient as I could wish." Deane also had a house in Paris, but Adams decided to lodge with Franklin in the house rented from Le Ray de Chaumont, a prosperous merchant and friend of America. Established there, Adams' first official act was to prevail on Franklin and Lee to write to Charles William Frederic Dumas, an agent of Congress at The Hague, informing him of Adams' arrival and of the desire of Congress to open negotiations with the Dutch. ("It seems clearly to be the interest of Holland to share in the rapidly growing commerce of her young sister republic," they wrote hopefully.) Since Holland was closely bound by commercial ties and treaty obligations to Great Britain, it was necessary to make such a circuitous approach.

Charles Dumas, to whom the letter was addressed, was a native of Switzerland who had spent most of his life in Holland, a learned man, a linguist, a student of the classics, and an editor of Vattel. Franklin had discovered in him a firm and devoted friend of the Revolution and had recommended to Congress that he be engaged as its secret agent in Holland. In this role he was indefatigable, transmitting letters, taking soundings of the Dutch temper, serving the cause in a hundred patient, skillful ways.

Included in the cast of characters with whom Adams was involved as congressional commissioner was Dr. Edward Bancroft, a native of Massachusetts, who had been a pupil of Silas Deane's when the latter was a schoolmaster. He had subsequently been an apprentice, run away to sea with some of his master's possessions, and then, after "some years of adventures," made enough money to return to his home town, repay his master, and go to sea once more. He found his way to England where he established himself as an expert on the natural history of Guiana and wrote a popular novel distinguished "by abuse and vilification of Christianity." He was the close friend and confidant of Franklin and lived by his wits, writing articles for the *Monthly Review*, meddling in stocks, frequenting "the deepest and darkest retirements and recesses of the brokers and jobbers, Jews as well as Christians," and spying for the British ministry. When Deane came to Paris, he renewed his acquaintance with his old pupil. Bancroft came to Paris and occupied himself as a kind of chore boy for Franklin and Deane. Engaging, learned and utterly corrupt, he was an entertaining, often useful, but since he was in the employ of the British Foreign Office an always unreliable friend.

William Carmichael was another of the strange company of official and unofficial servants of Congress in Paris. Carmichael was a Marylander and, like Bancroft, Izard and Arthur Lee, he had been in England when the Revolution began. He had come to Paris shortly before Adams' arrival and there he busied himself roiling the already troubled waters, quarreling with all the commissioners in turn, and firing off angry letters of denunciation to friends in America.

The first item of business was for Adams to present himself to the Count de Vergennes, the French Foreign Minister, at Versailles. The police, it seemed, had already informed Vergennes of Adams' arrival, and the Count assumed that Adams delayed his appearance in order to procure a proper French coat in which to be presented. Vergennes thus sent word that he would be glad to see Adams in his American coat. Accompanied by Franklin and Lee, Adams rode to Versailles and was politely received by the Count, who expressed the hope that he would stay long enough to learn French perfectly, a wish which, considering his painful lack of fluency, implied a long residence in Paris. Vergennes was the figure of the polished, aristocratic courtier, a graceful, gracious man, a little imperious and a little grand. The French treaty, he trusted, would be agreeable to Congress and the alliance between the two countries a lasting one. Adams replied that he thought the treaty liberal and generous and had no doubts that it would be promptly ratified by Congress.

From Vergennes's chambers Adams was conducted to the ancient Count Maurepas, the Prime Minister, a vigorous, ruddy, cheerful man, exiled by Louis XV and restored to favor by his son, the present King. After a brief audience with Maurepas, Adams toured the palace, through the galleries and royal apartments to the bedchamber of the King himself, past paintings and statues, tapestries and frescoed walls and ceilings. "The magnificence of these scenes is immense," he noted later in his diary, "everything is sublime." He felt an almost oppressive sense of the costliness and elegance of his surroundings. It was quite extraordinary—the rigid formality of court life, the ceremony, the strict conventions. He resolved to try to penetrate their meaning, to discover the human relevance of the vast, complex and opulent order. As they walked through the columned corridors the King and his retinue passed on the way to council, and His Majesty, a short, round, genial-looking man in a giant wig, recognizing Franklin and Lee, smiled graciously.[2]

The three commissioners then dined with Count Vergennes and a tableful of the grandees of France, going from thence to the Hôpital des Invalides where Adams marveled at the chapel, "immensely grand," and its paintings and statuary; then to the Ecole Militaire to see the statues of the great French generals—Condé, Turenne, Luxembourg and Saxe—and on next to the pleasant circle of the beautiful Madame Brillon, who played the spinet charmingly, talked delightfully, plied her visitors with tea and pastries, and lent Adams *Le voyage pittoresque de Paris* to guide him on his rambles about the city.

Although he had to stand in the shadow of Franklin, Adams found himself the recipient in Paris, as he had been in Bordeaux, of a hundred courtesies and favors, small and large. Again he went from house to house dining, drinking tea, listening to music. He began for the first time to catch French phrases and sentences. He even followed the purport of Prince de Tingry's conversation. The French nobleman was praising toleration and liberty of conscience "with an air of great condescension and complacency." As an indication of his own liberality, he declared that although he ardently wished for the conversion of all Protestants to the true faith he would not persecute them for their benightedness.

Madame la Marquise de Lafayette called to inquire about her husband

and Adams took an immediate fancy to her, so obviously devoted to her dashing young husband, so simple and unaffected in manner. Madame Lafayette invited Adams to dine at the home of her father, the Duke d'Ayen. At the Duke's palace Adams became absorbed in tracing the lineage of the great Noailles family, of which the Marquise was a member. Using as a guide the numerous family portraits, he identified bishops, generals and ministers of earlier generations who jostled each other on the walls of the château. There were, presently, six marshals of France bearing the Noailles name and they held between them so many distinguished offices under the King that it was estimated that they received eighteen million livres annually from the royal treasury. Most remarkable of all was the fact that the family invariably acted in concert, calling councils to decide on a common course in crises that confronted their country.

When the American Revolution began, the story went, the Noailles had held such a great council to determine what their attitude should be toward this distant uprising. The members of the council decided that it was an event of such importance to France and to the world that they must take a prompt and clear stand on it as a family, and after further debate they concluded to support it. It must affect France "in so essential a manner" that the King could not and ought not to avoid taking a conspicuous part in it, and in order to, in a sense, certify to the seriousness of their own commitment, they decided to send one of the most promising of their younger sons to fight in the Continental Army. They made up a list of those who might best serve in this capacity. The Prince de Poix, first on the list, was too important as second in command of the family's affairs and fortunes in France. Viscount de Noailles thought it better, for the time at least, to remain at home, so the baton was passed on to the young Marquis de Lafayette, then in his eighteenth year, and he "as a youth of the finest accomplishments and most amiable disposition, panting for glory and ardent to distinguish himself in military service, most joyfully consented to embark in the enterprise." He had thus departed with the blessings of his country, a symbol of French sympathy for the American cause. The story, unsubstantiated as it was, understandably charmed Adams.[3]

Adams also dined at the house of Count Sarsfield, one of the most celebrated men of the day. Among the guests were the Count de la Luzerne, brother of the Chevalier de la Luzerne, and a third Luzerne brother, the Bishop of Langres. Adams became engaged in conversation with the Bishop about the absence of a party in England which would oppose the policy of the court and espouse the American cause. The Bishop replied that the will of the King must control all public officers, so that, in effect, there could be no loyal opposition. Well, perhaps so, but in case an officer's conscience told him that the court policy was wrong he should beg to be excused or resign. Not at all, said the Bishop, "the King's will must govern." "That is a doctrine I cannot understand," Adams said stubbornly, and there the conversation rested.[4]

Dining at the Duchess d'Entille's, Adams met the great philosopher Condorcet, his face "as pale, or rather as white as a sheet of paper, I suppose from hard study," Adams noted. Condorcet was one of an illustrious company of French social theorists who believed that society could be radically reformed so as to produce an earthly Utopia where men, encouraged by a favorable environment that had been designed by philosophers, would become perfect, or at least perfect enough to live in peace and prosperity. The philosopher's noble dream of a perfect human society was as old as Plato's republic, perhaps, indeed, much older, but the dream, in Adams' view, failed to take into consideration the basic depravity of man, which had little or nothing to do with social arrangements. His first meeting with the Frenchman was inhibited by the barrier of language, and the New Englander had no opportunity to test the Frenchman's idealistic vision against his own tough-fibered realism.[5]

With Franklin and Lee, Adams went to the Versailles levée of Monsieur de Sartine, Minister of Marine. It was a function of the kind that Adams was to become thoroughly familiar with in time—a vast crush of people packed into every room, eating sweet cakes and drinking wine, circulating like a turgid stream through successive chambers. Sartine, in the middle of the compacted mass, greeted the Americans politely when they had made their way to his side and took them to his office to show them his books and papers. Did Monsieur Adams speak French? he asked, and Adams replied in copybook phrases, "*Un peu . . . si on parle lentement ou doucement.*" From the office they went to dinner, "splendid as usual; all elegance and magnificence." In the large company there were only four ladies; during the meal a number of men entered the dining room and walked around the table, stopping to converse with one diner or another.[6]

After dinner they left cards for Madame de Maurepas, delivered a copy of Adams' commission to the secretary of the Count de Vergennes, then went to a levée of Madame de Vergennes, and afterward rode back to Passy. This was the life of a diplomat at the French court, the vast part of it social, revolving about a succession of such functions at which attendance was, for the diplomatic corps, virtually compulsory. Amid the throng one's absence was noted and commented on, and on occasion could assume international importance.

The immediate business of the commissioners involved Adams in the conflict that had divided Franklin and Arthur Lee. William Lee, a London merchant with American sympathies and connections, had been appointed general superintendent of all the commercial affairs of Congress. Lee in turn had appointed a merchant named Schweighauser as his lieutenant and commercial agent for the United States, while Deane and Franklin earlier had placed Jonathan Williams, a native of Boston and a relative of the doctor's, in charge of prizes and men-of-war. William Lee, sharing some of Arthur's suspicious and choleric disposition, soon came into conflict with Williams over their respective jurisdictions. As a matter of proper order, Adams felt Williams' activities must be curtailed. At his insistence, Franklin signed a joint letter notifying Williams he could no longer draw on congressional funds and requesting him to settle his accounts. John Ross, an agent of Robert Morris, had drawn funds from the commissioners, apparently with the approval of Deane, but had refused to submit vouchers and accounts or even his own orders. Thus the commissioners had no control over funds for which they were held responsible. Again Adams was determined that the arrangement be terminated and Franklin reluctantly acceded.

Having made these points, Adams at once proceeded to burrow further into the tangled affairs of the commissioners, or more especially of the departed Deane. What he found dismayed him. A Monsieur Monthieu, with some claim on the friendship of Sartine, had demanded a large payment on a contract for arms supplied to the Continental Army. There was no record of such a contract. In addition, it was Monthieu who had been involved earlier in a shipment of damaged and obsolete muskets to America. Adams searched for account books, copies of letters received and sent, inquired of Franklin and Lee, but there was no record to be found of the vast business which Deane had conducted. He had kept matters largely in his own hands, consulted with Franklin when he pleased and with Lee hardly ever. All his accounts and letters, if he had kept any, he had apparently carried off with him.

The absence of even the skimpiest records meant that the finances of the commission were in a hopeless muddle. Beaumarchais, the author of the popular farce, *Figaro*, the maker of a jeweled watch for the Queen, an eloquent revolutionary pamphleteer, had been one of Deane's close friends and agents. As head of a dummy commercial company, he had used secret funds from the royal treasury to purchase desperately needed material for the American army. Beaumarchais's pipelines extended to high circles at the court—one of his closest friends was the Queen's treasurer. Another Deane confidant and erstwhile partner was John Holker, a French merchant and cotton manufacturer, who had also acted as agent for Deane in the purchase of supplies. Since all these operations were clandestine—the money secretly provided by the King in order to avoid an open rupture with England—it was extremely difficult to trace them. With the signing of a formal treaty with France recognizing American independence, the situation was changed. No longer were underground operations needed or desirable. French assistance in the form of money, cannon, gunpowder, muskets, shoes, blankets and, eventually, ships and soldiers could now cross the ocean openly without the intervention of dummy companies and secret agents. There was, of course, still much business of a financial nature to be supervised by the commissioners, in addition to the great volume of more traditionally diplomatic matters—passports, clearances for American vessels and privateers, provision for American prisoners in British hands, a large correspondence with the agents of Congress like John Bondfield in port cities, replies to official and unofficial queries, and an endless flow of correspondence to the newly established departments of Congress and to Congress itself.

Such exhausting and monotonous detail was not at all to the liking of the rather indolent and pleasure-seeking Franklin. He preferred to conduct his diplomacy on the level of the fashionable drawing room or levée. Arthur Lee was almost immobilized by his suspicions and animosities. It therefore fell to Adams to conduct most of the business of the congressional commissioners, not only in France but in a greater part of Europe. Adams found that he had stepped into an impossibly tangled web of personal and business contacts and relationships, in which, knowing the fallibility of human nature, he had little doubt that things had been done, or left undone, which would not bear the strictest scrutiny. Certainly, at best (and perhaps at worst), there had been a great deal of laxness and irregularity in the conduct of affairs.

In exculpation of Silas Deane, his friends, agents and partners, it need only be said that, at whatever cost in careful accounting and orderly procedures, they had provided a starving, ill-equipped army with at least some of the essential sinews of war. Adams was quite willing to acknowledge as much: "I have heard a great deal in this country concerning his conduct," he wrote Lovell of Deane, "—great panegyrics and harsh censures. But I believe he has neither the extravagant merit that some persons ascribe to him, nor the gross faults to answer for which some others impute or suspect. I believe he was a diligent servant of the public, and rendered it a useful service. His living was expensive, but whether he made the vast profit to himself that some persons suspect, I know not, or whether any profit at all."[7]

Again, he noted his apprehensions in his diary: "It is with much grief and concern that I have learned, from my first landing in France, the disputes between the Americans in this kingdom. . . . It is a rope of sand. I am at present wholly untainted with these prejudices, and will endeavor to keep myself so. Parties and divisions among the Americans here must have disagreeable if not pernicious effects. Mr. Deane seems to have made himself agreeable here to persons of importance and influence, and is gone home in such splendor that I fear there will be altercations in America about him."

Adams was the object of dozens of complaints and charges from the partisans of both sides. "What shall I say?" he asked his diary. "What shall

I think?" Lee did not have the confidence of Vergennes and the French court. He was suspected by the Foreign Minister of leaning too far toward England, of being too intimate with Lord Shelburne while in England to be entirely trustworthy. Above all he had displayed "an unhappy disposition," demanding, contentious, jealous of his authority. His servants, agents of the French court, had reported to Vergennes that he had, more than once, railed against the French nation and its government, "despising and cursing them." It was not, Adams reminded himself again and again, his business to take sides, but he was determined to "do my duty to the public, let it give offense to whom it will."[8]

What Adams of course did not know was that Arthur Lee's secretary, like Franklin's, was a British spy. Vergennes simply knew through his own agents that secret information was reaching the British ministry. Since he disliked Lee and felt that he was hostile to France, his suspicions fastened on him. The French minister had even gone so far as to enjoin Franklin and Deane (before the latter's departure) not to let their colleague know certain information which was passed on to them by the minister. It was, strictly speaking, improper for Vergennes to make such a request of the commissioners and it was equally improper of Deane and Franklin to accede. Lee had soon become aware that he was being excluded from important conversations and decisions and was, in consequence, furious. Naturally suspicious and almost pathologically sensitive, he resented his treatment loudly and persistently and made his resentment known to his powerful allies in Congress, more particularly to his brother Richard Henry and his friend Henry Laurens, seasoning his complaints, as we have seen, with charges of his own against Franklin and Deane.

Adams realized that Franklin was the kingpin. "The attention of the court seems most to Franklin," he wrote, "and no wonder: his long and great reputation, to which Lee's and mine are in their infancy, are enough to account for this"; but Franklin's age and indolence kept him from pushing deeply into matters, while Lee, on the other hand, with his "privy council," was always plotting against Franklin and thereby making the work of the commission infinitely more complicated.

"I found," Adams wrote, "that the business of the commisssion would never be done unless I did it. My two colleagues would agree on nothing. The life of Dr. Franklin was a scene of continual dissipation. I could never obtain the favor of his company in a morning before breakfast." Franklin had breakfast late and as soon as breakfast was over carriages began to arrive at the Chaumont house bringing a swarm of great and near great to visit the famous American. Among the crowd were "philosophers, academicians and economists, some of his small tribe of humble friends in the literary way, whom he employed to translate some of his ancient compositions such as his *Bonhomme Richard* . . . but by far the greater part," Adams noted sourly, "were women and children, come to have the honor to see the great Franklin, and to have the pleasure of telling stories about his simplicity, his bald head and scattering straight hairs." These visitors took up the morning hours until it was time for the philosopher to dress for some elaborate midday dinner. He was invited to dine every day, by Adams' account, and kept a little notebook with his engagements carefully recorded in it, the only thing, Arthur Lee said, in which the doctor was punctual. Adams and Arthur Lee would meet and put their heads together over commission business, draft letters which required the signature of all three commissioners and then pursue Franklin for several days before they could get him to add his name.

After dinner Franklin went sometimes to a play, sometimes to visit one of the philosophers—D'Alembert, Diderot, Condorcet, or the Abbé Mably, but most frequently to one of the numerous ladies, among them Madame Helvétius, Madame Bouillon, Madame Le Roy, and a host of others, who served him tea and entertained him by playing upon their pianofortes and other musical instruments and singing, or by playing cards, chess, backgammon and checkers. From these gentle diversions Franklin returned home anywhere from nine to twelve in the evening.

To regularize the business of the commission, Lee proposed that one room in his house in Paris be put aside as the office of the commissioners, that their papers all be kept there, and that they meet there every day at an appointed hour to conduct necessary business. Adams offered a counterproposal: that Lee move into the Chaumont house at Passy and the operations of the commissioners be combined there. It would be asking too much of Franklin to expect him to drive to Lee's house every day to do business. "Dr. Franklin's age," he wrote Lee, "his rank in the commission . . . his character in the world," plus the fact that "nine tenths of the public letters are constantly brought to this house, and will ever be carried where Dr. Franklin is," made Lee's suggestion impractical. But Adams welcomed the idea for a regular hour for meeting and proposed nine o'clock in the morning. If Lee should come to Passy, he continued, "it would remove the reproach we lie under, of which I confess myself very much ashamed, of not being able to agree together, and will render the commission more respectable, if not in itself, yet in the eyes of the English nation, the French nation and, above all, the American nation."[9] Lee, sensitive as he was, felt that Adams' reply, in effect, contained a censure of him. He could not consent to live in Chaumont's house because he suspected him of treachery. Therefore he must come to Passy daily to confer with the other commissioners and he could not arrive there before eleven o'clock.[10]

In actual fact, although Adams was well aware of Lee's shortcomings, it was Franklin whom he came increasingly to resent. It seemed to him that the Pennsylvania philosopher was, to put the matter quite simply, a fraud. He was certainly "a great genius, a great wit, a great humorist, a great satirist and a great politician," but "that he was a great philosopher, a great moralist and a great statesman is more questionable," he wrote. He was a great egotist, certainly, and a most ingenuous promoter, in Adams' view, of his own fame.

The two men were certainly in sharp contrast to each other. Almost thirty years separated their ages. Franklin, benign, worldly, adored, was despite all his pious maxims an unabashed hedonist who had never conquered "venery" as he called it, who had sired at least one illegitimate child, whose love affairs, even at the age of seventy, were the common gossip of Paris. He proposed marriage to Madame Helvétius; and the charming Madame Brillon sat on Franklin's lap in her salon and played chess with him while she bathed. He loved good living, luxuriated in the endless round of social events and in the applause and admiration that he received wherever he went. He reciprocated the affection of the French for him and loved all things Gallic—wit, women, philosophy, wine, food, balls, soirées, the life of the court and the *haut monde*. For all these reasons he was a spectacularly successful diplomat. Wherever his carriage passed, people lined the streets to watch him. Enterprising hucksters erected grandstands and sold seats to see him ride by. His face decorated the snuffboxes of lords, the compacts of ladies and the mugs and pitchers of simpler citizens. A gifted actor, he played and even dressed the part of a "simple American farmer" attired in a coonskin cap. He was, quite simply, the rage and the darling of France, and his years as congressional commissioner were a kind of extended love affair between the libertine moralist and the French nation.

Adams, for his part, took a dim view of such goings on. He resented Franklin's genial chicanery. Perhaps rightly, he suspected the doctor of a monstrous ego, deplored his morals and rejected his personal diplomacy. To be the representative of America in one of the great nations of the world, as he saw it, was difficult, demanding and even dangerous business. It called for polite, friendly but formal relations. France was an ally more than a benefactor. The French King had lent his support to the United States less because he loved a remote and little-known group of colonial insurrectionists than because he hated England and hoped to use colonial America to cut down his rival and gain some revenge for the humiliating defeat of the Seven Years' War. This being the case, mutual self-interest was to be consulted by both sides. Congress must be constantly on guard against the efforts of wily and experienced ministers to exploit the United States, to make it subservient to the interests of the French court. One of the greatest dangers was that, from being creatures of Great Britain, Americans should become the creatures of France. To prevent this, it was essential to keep emotional involvements to a minimum. The French people, sentimental and volatile, might take the American people to its collective bosom, but such a generous attachment would have little influence on the decisions reached by the King's advisers, whose only legitimate measure was the best interest of France. The flaw in Adams' position was the cold fact that America was a suppliant. Weak, impoverished, in desperate need of aid, Congress was dependent on the generosity of the French King, whatever his motives might be. In this situation the genial blandishments of Franklin and his rapport with the French ministers undoubtedly counted for a great deal.

The fact was that Franklin grasped the essentials of diplomacy with an instinct surer than any rational apprehension. A long life had prepared him for the intricacies of that demanding game. Adams was quite correct in his charge that Franklin, for all his genius, was lazy. What Adams, driven by his fierce energy and implacable sense of duty, could not perceive was that this was an ideal combination for a diplomat. Franklin was never inclined to do anything until something quite clearly needed to be done; then he did it in the easiest and most expedient way, the way that required the least effort and excited the least resistance. He shrank from contention and quarreling, in part because they were tiresome and time-consuming as well as futile. The contrast between his moralistic teaching and the hedonistic, indulgent life which led Adams to accuse this complex man of hypocrisy was characteristic of the artist who, creating a style and through his work intruding a moral, feels no compulsion to conform personally to the particular moral principles which inhere in his own artistic vision. Franklin was thus able to view with composure and indeed to aid Vergennes in the latter's effort to curtail Adams' powers and to place him directly under the count's control, without worrying about the question of whether it was proper or dignified for the United States to place itself under the domination of its ally. And this was so because Franklin, if not morally obtuse, had made that separation between art and life which enabled him to move easily through moral tangles that would have torn and tormented a less subtle and pliant man. Having accepted without demur Vergennes's efforts to subordinate American foreign policy to the interests of France, Franklin, as soon as he felt a real as opposed to a theoretical threat to America's aims and objectives, did not hesitate to ignore the instructions he had encouraged Congress to impose on the peace commissioners and to conceal from Vergennes those details of the negotiation with Great Britain with which he had reason to think the French minister would not sympathize.

Adams had a simpler and more rigid view of morals and of principles. To him they were not counters in a complicated game but the unshakable, essential elements of civilized life. He would as soon have thought of tampering with them as with the natural order of the universe. "The longer I live and the more I see of public men," he wrote James Warren, thinking of Franklin, "the more I wish to be a private one. Modesty is a virtue that can never thrive in public. . . . A man must be his own trumpeter, he must write or dictate paragraphs of praise in the newspapers, he must dress, have a retinue and equipage, he must ostentatiously publish to the world his own writings with his name, and must write even some panegyrics upon them, he must get his picture drawn, his statue made, and must hire all the artists in his turn, to set about works to spread his name, make the mob stare and gape, and perpetuate his fame."

So much for the art of press agentry in the eighteenth century. Adams felt that he had mastered it through watching the operations of his colleague Franklin. The Pennsylvanian had one of the best presses in history and a good deal of it, as Adams suggested, was due to his own shrewd and persistent efforts. He had quite consciously created a style for himself and set about to make that style into a universal image; the image was the homespun philosopher in the coonskin cap, the apostle of thrift and industry, the classic picture of the poor boy who makes good. It was an image of such persuasiveness that in time it would become part of a national psyche.

Adams had his own style to project, of course—the man of independence, of integrity, of Roman virtue—but the image was one that was far less appealing to the average man, and Adams, as he was ready to admit, was an amateur publicist. Franklin was busy projecting an image with which, in modern parlance, almost everyone could "identify"; Adams one with which, in its austerity and self-denying rigor, very few could identify, and furthermore, as we have seen, one which gave off something of the odor of self-righteousness.

"I would undertake," he observed to Warren, "if I could bring my feelings to bear it, to become one of the most trumpeted, admired, courted, worshiped idols in the whole world in four or five years. I have learned the whole art, I am a perfect master of it." He and Warren had in common, however, "an ugly modesty" which had robbed them of a great reputation in the world. "We have taken even pains to conceal our names, we have delighted in the shade, we have made few friends, no tools, and what is worse when the cause of liberty demanded it we have even sacrificed those who called themselves our friends and have made enemies." The art and ambition which Adams saw in the world disgusted and shocked him. He could only wait impatiently to be a private man once more.[11]

Samuel Adams tried to enlist John to make an investigation of the charges against Silas Deane, but Adams refused to be drawn into the "tittle tattle" which circulated about the deposed commissioner. The lot of the commissioners was not an easy one. One correspondent might write them from Spain, another from Nantes, another from Bordeaux demanding this or that, requesting information of the next sailing of a ship for America, "others take fire and write in great wrath, if they are modestly asked to render an account of monies they have received by order of the commissioners from their banker," and he had no doubt that Congress got many letters of complaint. "Between you and me," Adams wrote his namesake, "I have a difficult task—I am between two gentlemen of opposite tempers; the one may be too easy and good-natured upon some occasions—the other too rigid and severe upon some occasions. The one may perhaps overlook an instance of roguery from inadvertence and too much confidence—the other may mistake an instance of integrity for its opposite, in a very honest man, by too much impatience and diffidence. Yet both may be, and I believe are, honest men, and devoted friends to their country. But this," Adams continued, "is an ugly situation for me who do not abound in philosophy, and who cannot and will not trim." Congress would do best to close its ears to all allegations that were not made in writing and supported by affidavits and to lay no private letters before Congress.[12]

To Richard Henry Lee, Adams wrote in much the same spirit. He was caught between two armed camps. On the one side, Lee, high-tempered, full of suspicion and hostility toward France; on the other, Franklin, hedonistic and easygoing. "If I were to take every man's word, I should think there was not one disinterested American here, because it is very certain that there is nobody here that everyone speaks well of. . . . There is, I think, rather more of mutual reproaches, of interested views and designs, rather more of animosity among the Americans here, than I remember to have seen anywhere else. I will have nothing to do with any of these things. I will have nothing to do with designs and endeavors to run down characters, to paint in odious colors indifferent actions, to excite or propagate suspicions without evidence, or to foment or entertain prejudices of any kind, if I can possibly avoid it." It was Adams' intention to act as a peacemaker, a role he was little suited to by nature, and he warned against the heated and prejudiced accounts that Deane would give to Congress and against the "overloaded" letters from the Arthur Lee faction. At the same time he could not forbear to remark that the attentions paid Franklin by the social and intellectual luminaries of French society were such that the doctor's mind was kept "in . . . a constant state of dissipation." If he were left alone to conduct the business of the United States it would "suffer in a degree beyond description." Even if financial and marine matters were taken out of his hands, American affairs would suffer because of his indolence and because "it is his decided policy never to say yes or no decidedly but [only] when he cannot avoid it."[13]

Perhaps with plenty of time, with patience and with considerable tact, things might have been put aright without serious damage to reputations and sensibilities, without damage to particular (and doubtless often legitimate) interests. But Adams had neither the time, the patience nor the tact. He was not successful, nor did he make a strenuous effort to hide his own opinion of how the affairs of Congress had been managed. He thus aroused the irritation and often hostility of those who had been associated with and who had profited from the old order. The fact that his judgment of the proper channels for the disbursement of funds placed him in the camp of the Lees involved him directly in factionalism. A number of those whom he offended had the ear of persons high in the government. Vergennes himself had been on friendly terms with Deane and the displaced commissioner had carried away with him, as a mark of royal favor, a miniature of the King, set in diamonds.

Adams' position, as he well understood, was a delicate one and he was not the man to maintain, with skill and wise discretion, a delicate position. A more experienced or more cynical man would have promptly assessed the difficulties and dangers of the situation and remained quietly in the background, leaving the shortcomings of his fellow commissioners to become evident to all who could observe the way in which affairs were being conducted. But that was not Adams' nature. To him the issue was simple enough. Congress and his country had been badly served. If Franklin's personal diplomacy had been spectacularly successful, it contributed little or nothing to the tedious day-to-day business which must be carried on by the commissioners. Trying hard to steer between the shoals of party and faction, of personal resentment and ambition, Adams put his sturdy shoulder to the wheel and moved it slowly but surely out of the mire of confusion and inactivity in which it had been stuck fast.

To produce some kind of order out of the chaotic affairs of the commissioners, Adams decided that he would have to withdraw from the round of social activities which seemed to be their principal activity. He could not, of course, alter the pattern of life which Franklin so clearly delighted in, but he could practice austerity himself. Declining most invitations, he placed himself on a strict schedule which was in fact and probably intentionally a kind of daily rebuke to his elder colleague's sybaritic existence. Recruiting Lee, he regularly spent a portion of each day in the business of commission.

To save money he employed no clerk, although Lee and Franklin each had one and sometimes two. This seemed an unnecessary mortification of the flesh, and Adams compounded it by his abstinence from social life and his policy of staying home much of the time since he feared to leave the books and papers of the commissioners unguarded. "The extensive correspondence we have with Congress, with the court, with our frigates, our agents, and with prisoners, and a thousand others," took up the greater part of his days and a portion of his nights as well.

XXVII

FOUR DAYS after his arrival in Paris, Adams had put John Quincy in school at an academy at Passy. The master had come and interviewed Johnny, who packed up his things and went off in good spirits, pleased at hearing that prizes were given to the best students. The school was a typical French academy where dancing, fencing, music and drawing were taught as well as French and Latin.

John Quincy promptly wrote his mother—"so kind and tender a mamma as you have been to me for which I believe I shall never be able to repay you"—describing his school day. The pupils rose at six o'clock, dressed and went to class until eight-thirty when they had breakfast, and then, as John Quincy put, "play till nine when we go in and stay till twelve when we dine after dinner we play till two when we go in and stay till half after four when we come out and play till five when we go in and stay till half after seven when we sup after supper we go up and stay about an hour and go to bed."[1]

On weekends John Quincy usually joined his father and the two went sight-seeing, attended the theater, listened to the *concert spirituel* in the Royal Gardens, or strolled in the Tuileries. They went to the Foire St. Germain, "a public place full of curiosities," as John Quincy wrote Charles, the most astonishing of which was a woman who weighed four hundred and fifty pounds. "The large part of her arm," he reported with awe, "was as big around as my body . . . her thimble was big enough to put my thumbs into."[2] Father and son took long strolls in the countryside around Passy. Walking through the Bois du Boulogne one afternoon, they came upon a gate which they opened and found themselves "in a noble garden, the salads green and flourishing ready for the table," although it was the middle of February. "Long rows of wall fruits, trees of every species, apples, peaches, apricots, plums, etc.," stretched out in neat patterns. Passing through the grounds past the château, they came out into the street of Auteuil, the "next village to Passy" where "Boileau was born, lived and died."[3]

Easter week the theaters of Paris were shut up by royal decree and Adams noted that fashionable people of Paris, deprived of their daily amusements and topics of conversation, were quite at loose ends, so bored that they seemed hardly able to survive. To avoid the boredom, he conjectured, they had invented a kind of parade where all of fashionable Paris rode in carriages through the Longchamps, an astonishing and inappropriate display of wealth and beauty on Good Friday.

Yet John confessed freely to Abigail that "the delights of France are innumerable. The politeness, the elegance, the softness, the delicacy are extreme. In short, stern and haughty republican as I am, I cannot help loving these people for their earnest desire and assiduity to please. . . . The richness, the magnificence and splendor are beyond all description," he noted. "This magnificence is not confined to public buildings, such as churches, hospitals, schools, etc., but extends to private houses, to furniture, equipage, dress, and especially to entertainments." But Adams was determined not to have his head turned by so much beauty and splendor. "I cannot but consider them as bagatelles, introduced by time and luxury in exchange for the great qualities and hardy, manly virtues of the human heart." If human nature could be made happy simply by those things which appealed to "the eye, the ear, the taste, or any other sense, or passion, or fancy, this country would be the region for happiness." It made him uneasy—this constant assault upon the senses, this sensate culture, so insinuating, so delicate, so tempting, so full of soft blandishments. He felt compelled to renew his pledges of loyalty to the rocky hills of his own township. "I . . . would cheerfully exchange all the elegance, magnificence, the sublimity of Europe," he assured Abigail, "for the simplicity of Braintree and Weymouth."

The ladies Adams found especially congenial. They had been trained through centuries to please and flatter men. They were without the silly mannerisms and affectations that often annoyed him in American women. With an assured graciousness they held their own in masculine conversation and presided over brilliant salons crowded with scholars and philosophers, painters, poets and wits. In France, Adams saw for the first time a truly civilized social relationship between the sexes and he confessed himself much impressed. The Frenchwomen were "handsome and very well educated. Their accomplishments," he wrote Abigail, "are exceedingly brilliant, and their knowledge of letters and arts exceeds that of the English ladies, I believe." He watched a little enviously as his colleague Dr. Franklin enthusiastically embraced these charming creatures and was, in turn, warmly embraced by them. It seemed to him the doctor was inclined to abuse the privileges that fame and old age accorded him.[4]

Adams especially enjoyed the theater. It provided the opportunity for painless French lessons; he would take the text of the play and follow the words of the actors, thus improving his understanding of the spoken language. At the performance of Voltaire's *Alzire,* Adams sat in a box near the famous old philosopher himself. Between the acts the audience continually clapped and applauded him. There were loud cries, "Voltaire, Voltaire," and the old man rose and bowed to the crowd. Adams noted that he had still "much fire in eyes, and vigor in his countenance."

Between social engagements Adams spent every hour working to improve his command of French. He was unwilling to employ a teacher and his principal resource became two learned abbés, Chalut and Arnoux, who visited him almost daily. The abbés were as destitute of English as Adams was of French but one way or another they made themselves understood while Adams, sometimes through an interpreter "and sometimes by gibbering something like French," made them understand him. He derived some consolation in his efforts to master the foreign tongue by observing the fact that Franklin, who seemed to fancy that he spoke fluent French, did not speak grammatically and even his pronunciation, Adams noted, was "very far from being exact." To further improve his French, he decided to keep a journal in that language, but after several days of the experiment he gave it up, comforting himself with the thought that, since the servants in the house were undoubtedly spies in the pay of the French government, it would be dangerous to keep a journal in their tongue.

One of the things which perpetually astonished Adams was the freedom with which great men paraded their mistresses. Dining at the Marshal de Maillebois's with a company of generals, bishops, ministers of the government and fine ladies, someone pointed out to him the Marshal's "*amie.*" With a pleasant agitation at his proximity to glamor and wickedness, Adams joined Lee in conversation with the lady. She was rather homely but an amusing talker and John took note of another French oddity: the "*amie*" had been quite evidently chosen for her "wit and sense" rather than her personal charms. The Marshal himself, it was rumored, wished to have command of the American army, and Deane had connived with Vergennes to this end. Adams was horrified at the story, which gained apparent confirmation from a casual remark of Vergennes. The incident served to strengthen his conviction that the French ministry would like to take over the American Revolution and America with it, at least to the extent that the United States should be (as nearly as it was possible to make her) dependent on the French government. He kept his feelings to himself but silently resolved to be "buried in the ocean, or in any other manner sacrificed, before I will voluntarily put on the chains of France when I am struggling to throw off those of Great Britain."[5]

After the usual stupefying noonday meal at the Marshal's, the three Americans went off amicably enough to the Academy of Sciences where they heard D'Alembert, a disciple of Voltaire and editor with Diderot of the great *Encyclopédie,* one of the leading lights of the French intelligentsia, pronounce eulogies on several recently deceased members. Again Voltaire was present and this time the members of the Academy raised the cry for the ancient Frenchman and the septuagenarian Franklin, the oracle of the Old World and the sage of the New, the two most famous literary men of their age. Responding to the clamor, the two old men rose and bowed to each other. The audience was not satisfied with such a formal exchange of courtesies. The calls and exclamations continued. The philosophers shook hands warmly. This was still not enough for the audience, now thoroughly aroused. They must embrace in the French manner. "The two aged actors," Adams wrote, "upon this great theater of philosophy and frivolity then embraced each other by hugging one another in their arms and kissing each other's cheeks." The sea of Gallic emotion which had engulfed the two subsided and a voice called out in French, "What a charming sight to see Solon embracing Sophocles." Wild applause! But Adams, well aware of his colleague's deficiencies as a political theorist, noted the compliment wryly. Great scientist and philosopher as the Pennsylvanian might be, he was not to be compared as a lawgiver to the immortal Solon.

Through the rest of the Academy's proceedings, John noted a strain of lightness which seemed to him out of keeping with the deliberations of such a dignified and weighty body. One member had prepared a scholarly paper on "The Art of Making Wine," and when the topic was announced the audience broke into enthusiastic applause before, Adams noted sternly, they had even heard the essay. In all the papers that were presented there was, moreover, a "kind of affectation" that disconcerted Adams. Serious subjects, he felt, should be treated seriously. He was mildly shocked to observe that many of the authors "seemed to search for opportunities to introduce hints and sarcastical allusions to the frivolities, vanity, affection, follies and prejudices of their own nation." Instead of being hissed, the audience seemed delighted at the sallies—"nothing seemed to produce more gaiety and good humor." An observation that he had once read, to the effect that the nation which could laugh at its own vices and then go off and repeat them was in the last stages of decadence, occurred to him as he listened to the distinguished gathering ridiculing the failings of the French people so lightheartedly. What must be the future of such a people? A similar attitude would certainly never be tolerated in America and even in England, if John Bull permitted certain liberties, no one was allowed to impugn "his essential characteristics of integrity, good sense, sound judgment, great courage and humanity. If you touch these," John wrote, "you touch an Englishman to the quick." The French, measured by the only standard Adams knew, were a strange people.[6]

The opera was one of the principal social events of the city and Adams at first thoroughly enjoyed it. "There is everything," he wrote, "which can please the eye or the ear." But he found the words unintelligible, "and, if they were not," he added, "they are said to be very insignificant." Typically he wished "in such an amusement to learn something," and felt increasingly frustrated as the singers trilled or bellowed their incomprehensible way through the performances. "The imagination, the passions, and the understanding," he noted, "have too little employment in the opera."

Among the arts painting was especially important to Adams. Everywhere that he went his first attention was given to the paintings. He was deeply interested in aesthetic theory—in the question of what made a picture good or bad—and he particularly admired paintings that depicted strong emotions, that dealt with a classical theme and told moving stories. He spoke admiringly of a picture of Dubourg's showing the farewell of Hector and Andromaque, a picture "in which the passions were strongly marked." He wanted a painting to tell a story, preferably with an improving moral, but he was, at the same time within this dominant canon, a shrewd and discriminating critic of particular artists and particular pictures. He searched always for the human meaning in art and decoration.

To Abigail he wrote: "It would be endless to attempt a description of this country. It is one great garden. Nature and art have conspired to render everything here delightful." Even the religion and government of France did not depress him because he had "well fixed it in my mind as a principle that every nation has a right to that religion and government which it chooses, and as long as any people please themselves in these great points, I am determined they shall not displease."[7]

Adams continued to struggle with the accounts, or lack of accounts, of the commission's business. Into his official letterbook went copies of all letters sent by the three commissioners. Agents and factors who had grown accustomed to drawing freely on the commissioners for monies to pay for supplies purchased in the name of Continental Congress were sent stern letters advising them that no further funds would be forthcoming unless they had been authorized in advance by the commissioners.

Despite his resolution to eschew social engagements, Adams was so much involved that he noted in his diary for May 5: "Am to dine at home; a great rarity and a great blessing!" At dinner Stevens brought Adams a letter from Vergennes informing him that the King would formally receive him on the eighth of the month. Enjoying the luxury of dining at home, Adams spent the forenoon poring over the affairs of the commissioners with Arthur Lee and then went to see the King review his guards, eight thousand magnificently drilled and equipped

French and Swiss soldiers. As he watched the soldiers march by in ruler-straight lines, their bayonets and swords glistening in the sun, he could not help thinking of the awkward, unfinished Continental troops in their ragged collection of motley uniforms. The fashionable spectators, the royal carriages, the martial music made a scene brilliant beyond description.

When the day of his presentation to the King arrived, Adams, instructed in protocol, his wig dressed with special care, attired in a handsome costume purchased for the occasion, set off for Versailles with Franklin and Lee. At eleven o'clock they waited on the Count de Vergennes at his office and then went with him to the King's rooms where His Majesty was being dressed by the officers of the bedchamber, one noble lord putting on his coat, another buckling on his sword, a third arranging his wig, a fourth putting on his stockings. The King, twenty-four years old, was a stout, cheerful young man, healthy and vigorous-looking. Vergennes went up to him and spoke; His Majesty turned toward Adams and smiled. "*Est-ce Monsieur Adams?*" he asked, following with a question too rapidly spoken for Adams to understand. The Foreign Minister then conducted Adams to the door of another room and instructed him to stand there until the King passed. As the monarch walked by Adams heard Vergennes tell him that the new commissioner had not yet mastered French sufficiently to attempt to speak it.

It was "ambassadors' day" at court, the day when all the diplomatic corps of Paris went to Versailles to be presented to the King and Queen, to the King's eldest brother, to the Count d'Artois, his youngest brother, to his sister and his two aunts. To each ambassador or minister the King and the members of his family spoke a few polite and formal words. After Adams had been received in the King's bedchamber and passed through the reception line, bowing awkwardly to each of the royal entourage, he went on to pay his formal respects to the Count de Maurepas, Monsieur Sartine and the Chancellor. When Adams was introduced to the latter gentleman, a great scholar and a learned man, he was enormously gratified to hear him say to Franklin, who stood beside him, "Monsieur Adams is a renowned person in America and in Europe."

Despite his conscientious efforts to bring some order out of the business of the commission, Adams felt like something of a fifth wheel. As soon as Congress would release him he would return "with submission to old ocean, old Boreas, and British men-of-war. . . . As to the public, I am full persuaded that its interests are not at all concerned in my residence here, as there is a great plenty of persons quite as well qualified," he wrote Lovell.[8] After reviewing the Lee-Franklin conflict, he added, "All that I request is that I may not be drawn into the dispute. Europe has not charms enough for me to wish to stay here to the exclusion of able negotiators, much less at the expense of heat and divisions in Congress. . . . But one thing I beg of my friends, and one only, that if any attempt of that kind [to oust him] should be made they would give me up, rather than continue my residence at the expense of debates in Congress and by the favor of small majorities."

Far more important than diplomatic negotiations were the fighting qualities of the American army. "Extravagant claims to merit are always to be suspected," he observed. "General Gates was the ablest negotiator you ever had in Europe; and next to him, General Washington's attack upon the enemy at Germantown. I do not know, indeed, whether this last affair had not more influence upon the European mind than that of Saratoga; although the attempt was unsuccessful, the military gentlemen of Europe considered it as the most decisive proof that America would finally succeed. . . .

"You may depend upon it," he added, "although your agents in Europe were to plead with the tongues of man and angels, although they had the talents and experience of Mazarin or the integrity of D'Asset, your army in America will have more success than they."[9]

And to Samuel Adams he wrote: "Our affairs in this kingdom I find in a state of confusion and darkness that surprises me. Prodigious sums of money have been expended and large sums are yet due, but there are no books of account nor any documents from whence I have been able to learn what the United States have received as an equivalent." Congress was maintaining three commissioners in France at a cost of at least three thousand pounds sterling a year, and it got little return for its money. One envoy or minister plenipotentiary with several clerks or secretaries could do the work of the three and do it much more efficiently. The fact that the agents of Congress were free to carry on private business as well as Continental business meant a hopeless mixing of public and private interests to the detriment of the public, so that even when individuals had acted with complete probity and honor they would find it almost impossible to clear themselves of charges that their private interests had profited from their management of public concerns. The offices of ministers or envoys should be clearly separated from those of commercial agents. The holders of the latter offices might be allowed to conduct private business, but not the former. "The inconveniences arising from the multiplicity of ministers and the complications of business are infinite," he added.[10]

"My opinion and advice is," he affirmed, "to recall every commissioner you have in the world, excepting one to this court and one to Spain, and appoint consuls or commercial agents at Nantes and Bordeaux. Recall me, and leave Dr. F. here alone; but then you must take from him all money matters, all commercial and maritime matters." While there are hints that Adams had been tempted to consider himself a possible candidate for the office, he realized that Franklin was the logical choice. "His character has excited such an enthusiasm," he wrote Lovell, "that it would do great harm to recall him—and one alone is enough."[11]

Adams' advice to Congress to appoint only one commissioner to the French court and one to the Spanish and call the rest home marked a change from the militia diplomacy which he had earlier advocated—the practice of dispatching representatives of Congress to all the major European nations, with the idea that they might collect information, encourage commerce, arouse sympathy for the United States and prepare the way for eventual recognition and for treaties of alliance and commerce. Until the existing system was reformed Congress would be badly served at great cost.

The causes for the ineffectiveness of Congress' agents abroad were in essence the same as the reasons for ineptitude and confusion at home: "the novelty of the scenes, the inexperience of the actors, and the rapidity with which great events have succeeded each other." In some port cities two or three individuals claimed the position of American agent. In a particular city one man credited his appointment to William Lee, another to the commissioners at Passy, while a third traced his directly to the Commercial Committee of Congress. The result was waste, confusion and duplication of effort. Various agents were drawing unauthorized bills almost daily on the commissioners, and commanders of American ships were likewise drawing upon them for expenses and supplies which had not been ordered or approved by the commissioners. "We find it so difficult," Adams added, "to obtain accounts from agents of the expenditure of moneys, and of the goods and merchandises shipped by them, that we can never know the true state of our finances, or when and in what degree we have executed the orders of Congress for sending them arms, clothes, medicine or other things."[12]

Franklin's own letters to Congress reinforced Adams': "Where everyone must be consulted on every particular of common business in answering every letter, etc., and one of them is offended if the smallest thing is done without his consent," the doctor wrote, "the difficulty of being often and long enough together, the different opinions and the time consumed in debating them, the interruptions by new applicants in the time of meeting, etc., occasion so much postponing and delay that correspondence languishes, occasions are lost, and the business is always behindhand."[13]

In May, Captain John Paul Jones of the *Drake*, sailing under a commission from Congress, arrived in Brest with a captured ship of the British navy. He wrote to the commissioners asking that he be given authority to return his prisoners to America and notifying them that he had drawn a bill of exchange for twenty-four thousand livres to distribute among his officers as a reward for capturing the British vessel. The commissioners replied to Jones that they were attempting to negotiate an exchange of prisoners with England and also informed him regretfully but firmly that they had been "under the disagreeable necessity of refusing payment" of the prize money. His draft should first of all have been drawn on Monsieur Schweighauser, the only authorized American commercial agent at Brest. Beyond that the commissioners had no authority "to make presents of the public money to officers or men, however gallant or deserving." Such matters were the concerns of Congress, "and must be done by the proper boards in America." The authority of the commissioners extended only to having necessary repairs made to American ships sailing under congressional orders, and to the purchase of supplies.

Jones had placed one of his officers, Lieutenant Simpson, under arrest for disobeying orders and wished to have a court-martial convened to punish him for his dereliction. There were not, the commissioners informed him, American officers of proper rank in France to form a court-martial board so Simpson must be returned to the United States for trial. As for Jones's claim for the entire prize money from the sale of the captured ship, the commissioners knew of no such provision by Congress and asked Jones for a copy of the resolution.

Again there was a conflict between the commissioners. Jones, a sensitive and arrogant man, had been originally sponsored by Franklin, who had procured his commission from Congress and his command of the *Drake*, a castoff French vessel. Since Franklin was Jones's advocate, Lee was his enemy. Moreover the Captain's demanding and highhanded attitude made him vulnerable to Lee's objections and annoyed Adams. Franklin, forced reluctantly to join his colleagues in their rebuke to his protégé, tried to smooth the Captain's ruffled feathers by a warm personal letter of congratulation and the news, a few days later, of a proposal to put Jones in command of a fine large frigate that had just been built at Amsterdam. Franklin had arranged for Jones's command with the Minister of Marine, Sartine. It was a secret and Jones was cautioned by Franklin to say nothing of it to the other commissioners. But Jones continued to plague the commissioners. Lieutenant Simpson thought that he had had justification for his resistance to his Captain and he pressed his case with considerable enterprise and energy. The French banker who had advanced money to Jones to distribute among the officers and men of the *Drake* complained bitterly to his own government that the commissioners had stopped payment on a draft which he honored in good faith and as a courtesy to his nation's ally. The commissioners, in turn, received a stern letter from Sartine. The Minister of Marine was confident not only that the commissioners would repay the sums advanced to Jones but also the cost of supplies provided by the Marine office at Brest.[14]

Prodded by Adams, the commissioners had written Sartine a few days earlier asking that the heavy duties paid for supplies necessary to re-equip the *Boston* at Bordeaux be suspended in the case of all American ships of war, and complaining that the sale of prizes brought in to French ports by American captains were so slow, surrounded by so much red tape, and subject to such heavy charges that it hardly seemed worth while for privateers or American naval vessels to cruise in European waters.

Again it was Adams' determined hand that drafted the reply to Sartine, defending the action of the commissioners. "We think it extremely irregular in merchants to draw bills," he wrote, "before they send their accounts, and in captains of ships of war to draw for any sums they please without previous notice and express permission. . . . If this liberty assumed of drawing on us without our knowledge or consent is not checked, and we obliged to pay such drafts, it will be impossible for us to regulate our own contracts and engagements so as to fulfill them with punctuality, and we might in a little time become bankrupts ourselves. If, therefore," he added stiffly, "Monsieur Bersolle [the banker] has brought himself into any embarrassment, it is not our fault, but his." As for the supplies furnished by the Caisse de la Marine, they would be readily and gratefully paid when proper bills were submitted.[15]

David Hartley, a member of the British House of Commons, and George Hammond, another Englishman, came to visit Franklin. The party went with Chaumont in his carriage to the *concert spirituel* where a great number of musicians played and "a gentleman sung, and then a lady." Adams was suspicious and disapproving of the Englishmen's visit. Hartley was, true enough, a famous scientist, a friend of liberty, and a champion in Parliament of the American cause, but nonetheless he was a representative of the enemy and should be treated with great reserve. To the Englishman's queries about Congress, the state of the Continental Army and American affairs in general, Adams replied curtly and evasively. He was convinced that the two men came with the consent if not at the behest of Lord North "to sound out the American ministers, and see if there were no hopes of seducing us from our connection with France, and making a separate accommodation with us." Hartley, offended by Adams' coolness, reported on his return to England that, while Adams might be a man of good sense, "he is the most ungracious man I ever saw." When the comment reached Adams, he heard it with a kind of grim satisfaction. Franklin, with his easy, careless ways, might be seduced from the proper posture of diplomacy, but not he.

Yet John, for all his suspicion of Hartley, wrote soon after his arrival in France to Edmund Jenings, an American living in England. Jenings, who represented himself as a devoted friend of the cause of freedom, had offered to act as Adams' agent and to provide him with such information of British acts and intentions as came to his ears.

Adams wrote Jenings about his *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*—"a kind of philosophical and political rhapsody, written when I was not very old, and when I had certainly seen very little of this world, and knew but little of men or things." It had been published in England under the title *The True Sentiments of America*. He would like Jenings to try and procure a copy of it and have it reprinted in Almond's *Remembrancer*, a liberal magazine friendly to America. When it was first published in the Boston *Gazette*, it had had, he wrote, "an effect upon the people of New England beyond all imagination—it appeared to them to point out the means by which human nature had been degraded in Europe . . . perhaps no one thing that ever was written or done contributed more than that publication to unite the people of New England as one man in the resolution of opposing force to the Stamp Act, and of having recourse to arms rather than submit to it." It seemed to Adams that the publication of his essay at this moment would have a good effect on his "public character" and therefore on his mission. It would, perhaps, be a way of getting out from under the shadow of Franklin, a way of showing supercilious Frenchmen that he was a philosopher and theorist in his own right; a counterargument to set against the cloudy speculations of Condorcet, Rousseau, Voltaire and the other luminaries of the Enlightenment philosophy.

On the fourth of July 1778, Adams, anxious to do what he could to heal the breach between the Lee and Franklin factions, invited all the Americans in Paris and the vicinity to Passy to have dinner with him and Franklin and honor the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Included in the company were some of the "French gentlemen in the neighborhood" who were firm friends to the cause. Adams sent his own card with Franklin's to Ralph Izard and the other members of the anti-Franklin faction. "The day passed joyfully enough," he noted, "and no ill humor appeared from any quarter."

Early in July someone threw into Franklin's window at Passy an extraordinary letter which Franklin felt had been drawn up with the connivance of George III. After stating that England would never accept American independence, the writer, who signed himself Weissenstein, went on to propose a separate treaty between England and the United States based on a confederation. The most remarkable feature of the letter, in Adams' view, was a proposal to bestow on the leaders of the American cause—Franklin, Washington, Adams and Hancock among them—offices or pensions for life with the additional observation that "in case His Majesty or his successor should ever create American peers, then these persons or their descendants shall be among the first created, if they choose it." There were twenty closely written pages setting forth the terms of such a confederation in detail. Franklin conferred with Adams and the two agreed that nothing should be done in response to the letter without informing the French court. Franklin drafted a reply to the letter and sent the reply with the letter itself to Vergennes. As Adams wrote later, "We thought the whole subject so futile that I think we never submitted any account of it to Congress."[16] They were to meet the writer in a particular spot at the cathedral of Notre Dame to have a personal conference and deliver their answer. Adams and Franklin suspected that the writer hoped they would forward the proposal to Congress "and that they might be tempted by it, or that disputes might be excited among the people. . . . It was very weak and absurd, and betrayed a gross ignorance of the genius of the American people. . . . The English," Adams wrote, "were strangely infatuated with an idea that Adams and Hancock, Washington and Franklin, with a few others, in the several states, as they had influenced enough to throw off the authority of Great Britain, would have influence enough to put it on again, as a man who has strength enough to throw off his cloak may be supposed able to throw it again over his shoulders." America had been independent for two years and would never again, under any circumstances, accept a role subordinate to Great Britain.

Reflecting on the implications of the letter, Adams discerned three dominant issues: the danger of a negotiated peace with England that did not recognize American independence; any congressional act which might imperil the French alliance; and, finally, the state of Continental finances. There was a report current that Lord North had sent commissioners to the United States to treat for peace on the basis of the colonies remaining within the Empire. The story was that the commissioners carried very generous concessions from Parliament and John was alarmed lest Congress should respond favorably to them. "My dear countrymen," he wrote Henry Laurens, "I hope you will not be allured upon the rocks by the siren song of peace." The Americans were "now playing a sure game. They have run all hazards, but now they hazard nothing."[17]

The proposal of a separate peace, he wrote Samuel Adams, was "a modest invitation to a gross act of infidelity and breach of faith." Great Britain and the United States were doomed to be enemies as long as their territory was contiguous, as it was in Canada and the Floridas. Neighboring nations were "never friends in reality. In the times of the most perfect peace between them, their hearts and their passions are hostile, and this will certainly be the case forever between the thirteen United States and the English colonies. France and England, as neighbors and rivals, never have been and never will be friends. The hatred and jealousy between the nations are eternal and irradicable." America, therefore, must depend upon the friendship of France and reconcile itself to the enmity of England. "The United States . . . will be for ages the natural bulwark of France against the hostile designs of England against her, and France is the natural defense of the United States against the rapacious spirit of Great Britain against them," he concluded.[18]

When word reached Paris of the rebuff of the Carlisle commission, Adams wrote to Warren a letter full of cautious optimism. France applauded the resolutions of Congress upon the conciliatory bills of Parliament and the American expressions of firmness were read and admired everywhere. The French fleets were "giving such a check to [Britain's] naval pride as she has not experienced before for many ages." The reactions of Congress to the various efforts to seduce them from their French alliance had been just as Adams had predicted they would be. Good faith with the French, he wrote, "is our American glory, and it is our bulwark, it is the only foundation on which our union can rest securely, it is the only support of our credit both in finance and commerce, it is our sole security for the assistance of foreign powers." The idea of violating the treaty could not, therefore, "be treated with too much resentment or too much horror. The man who can think of it with patience is a traitor in his heart, and ought to be execrated as one who adds the deepest hypocrisy to the blackest treason."

For the argument that an alliance with France would imperil the Protestant religions in America, Adams professed nothing but scorn. "The spirit for crusading for religion," he wrote, "is not in France. The rage of making proselytes which has existed in former centuries is no more." The temper of France in religious matters was far more tolerant than he had ever expected to find it. Nothing, indeed, was clearer "than that in this enlightened tolerant age, at this vast distance, without claim or color of authority . . . (this, I had almost said tolerant nation), can never endanger our religion."

To James Warren he repeated the arguments he had used with Samuel Adams, relative to the French alliance. France was the rock on which America must build. "Narrow and illiberal prejudices peculiar to John Bull, with which I might have been in some degree infected when I was John Bull, have now no influence with me. I never was much of [a] John Bull. I was John Yankee and such I shall live and die." His soul longed for peace, a peace which would be the delight and the prosperity of America, a peace which would allow him, and Warren too, to "return to our farms to enjoy the fruits of them, spending our old age recounting to our children the toils and dangers we have encountered for their benefit."[19]

To Richard Henry Lee, Adams wrote urging that confederation of the states be pushed to its conclusion. "The eagerness to complete the American code," he noted, "and the strains of panegyric in which they speak and write of those parts of it which have been published in Europe, are very remarkable, and seen to indicate a general revolution in the sentiments of mankind upon the subject of government."

The other and in a way even more pressing issue was the question of congressional finances. Having received a generous loan from France, Congress had proceeded to draw upon it in the most reckless manner. As Adams wrote Lovell, "You have drawn so many bills of exchanges upon us and sent so many frigates [for outfitting], every one of which costs us a vast sum of money; so many merchandisers and ministers of war have been sent, whether arrived or not; and we expect so many more draughts upon us that I assure you I am very uneasy concerning our finances here." The commissioners were making every effort "to hire money"—that is, to make loans—but prospects were uncertain at best. Even if it was possible to hire money in Europe, the payment of interest would be a dreadful drain on American resources. But loans seemed impossible. Austria was trying to borrow money in Holland, England was borrowing there and so was France. "Amidst such demands for money," Adams wrote, "and by powers who can offer better terms, I fear we shall not be able to succeed." Finance was perhaps Congress' greatest failure: printing vast quantities of paper money and borrowing from its allies seemed to be the limit of that body's resources.[20] It was of greatest importance, he admonished his cousin, to support the credit of Congress and this could only be done by "Taxes, my dear sir, taxes! Pray let our countrymen consider and be wise; every farthing they pay in taxes is a farthing's worth of wealth and good policy."

Indeed, the commissioners were haunted by the fear that drafts by Congress or its agents would exhaust the available funds, that bills would be protested, and that American credit, precarious at best, would suffer irreparable damage. With money from private lenders almost impossible to procure, the only relief from their dilemma lay in further loans from the French government. They thus turned reluctantly to this source once more and addressed Vergennes with some embarrassment. At a time when the expenses of the French government were very heavy, they confessed themselves sorry "to be obliged to request Your Excellency's advice respecting the subject of money; but the nature of the war in America, the vast extent of country to defend . . . and, above all, this war having been conducted in the midst of thirteen revolutions of civil government against a nation very powerful, both by sea and land, has occasioned a very great expense to a country so young and to a government so unsettled." Congress had not sufficient money to pay the interest on the paper money that it had borrowed, and while it was true that the United States was "already under obligations to His Majesty's goodness for considerable sums of money," these sums were almost exhausted. It was therefore the hope of the commissioners that the King's generosity would be extended to the sum of another 750,000 livres, with the rather forlorn assurance that "the moment we are furnished with any other means of answering this demand we will no longer trespass on His

Majesty's goodness." The commissioners, in addition, asked for permission to try to negotiate a loan to the sum of two million pounds sterling in France, solicited the support of France against the Barbary pirates, and asked for permission to exchange American for English prisoners at Brest.[21]

Adams was increasingly concerned at what seemed to him a lack of complete confidence and candor on the part of the French court. "They appear to me," he wrote Gerry, "to have too much diffidence of us, too much diffidence of the people of America, and too much reserve toward the commissioners here." Whether this reserve was due to a feeling of cultural difference, to an uneasiness over the role of Spain and that nation's reluctance to sign a treaty of alliance with the United States, or whether Vergennes disliked particular commissioners or was suspicious of them, Adams was unable to say. Whatever the reason, he had never noticed "any disposition in any minister of state to talk with any of the commissioners either upon intelligence from Spain or England, upon the designs or negotiations of either, or any other court in Europe, or upon the conduct of the war by sea or land." The real root of the reserve of the French court may be found in the fact that when Adams arrived the three commissioners were pitted against each other. "This dissension, I suspect, has made the ministry cautious, lest in the course of altercations improper use should be made of free communication. . . . I am determined, if I am continued here," he added, "to have free communication with the ministry upon these subjects, and to search them to the bottom."[22]

On the other hand, as he wrote to Roger Sherman, there was another hazard to be guarded against by America. There was the danger that Congress and its representatives would be too differential to France, too timid and too overawed to stand up for the best interests of their country. "There is danger," he noted, "that French councils and emissaries and correspondents may have too much influence in our deliberations." Congress must be alert to the possibility that the French court would try to take advantage of splits and factions in that body to attempt to guide and control its deliberations, and that some Americans, in turn, would attempt to use the French connection "to raise their reputation, to extend their influence . . . in short, to promote the purposes of private ambition and interest."[23]

The matter of the definitive treaty with France involved Adams in several articles in the original draft. Izard complained that Franklin had excluded him from the negotiations while he had confided in the dubious Bancroft and in Franklin's grandson, William Temple. In addition to raising the question of whether he had a right to be informed of the treaty, Izard attacked the eleventh and twelfth articles of that document, which involved the New England fisheries, arguing that they were clearly detrimental to the interests of the United States and should never have been accepted by the commissioners in the preliminary articles. Moreover the language of Article VIII, Izard pointed out, could be interpreted in such a way as virtually to exclude New England fishermen from the waters off Newfoundland and the Grand Banks.

Adams, piqued at the implication that he had been negligent of the interests of his own region and naïve in accepting the French treaty without careful scrutiny, answered Izard's letter quite curtly. He acknowledged the Southerner's discernment and admitted that the fisheries were a "source of wealth, of commerce and naval power" which "ought to be attended to with precision and cherished with care." But the truth was that agriculture was "the most essential interest of America." The war had taught New Englanders that the fishery was not as vital to their welfare as they had once thought and some were of the opinion that it had been "a source of luxury and vanity that did us much injury. . . . One part of our fish went to the West India Islands for rum and molasses to be distilled into rum, which injured our health and our morals"; another part went to Spain and Portugal for gold and silver which was used in London to purchase "but too often . . . lace and ribbons." The cessation of the fishery for twenty years might make New Englanders a better and more moral people. But Adams realized he was on weak ground. "The taste for rum and ribbons will continue," he wrote, "and there are no means for the New England people to obtain them so convenient as the fishery." In addition the fishery, as Izard had pointed out, was a nursery for seamen and for this if for no other reason Adams would consider it his duty to "defend and secure our rights to it with all industry and zeal." He thus suppressed his chagrin at being taken to task by a Southerner for laxness in attending to an interest of his own state and thanked Izard for his "advice and co-operation."[24]

Izard, in reply, suggested to Adams that if the fisheries were the cause of introducing luxury and vanity into New England it must be the "fault of the people rather than of the fishery." The same charge could be made against any industry which produced wealth in a state. The money realized from the fishery could be used to reduce the public debt rather than to assuage New England's passion for "ribbons and lace." And until the debt was paid off, he added, "I do not think that any danger to our morals is to be apprehended from our excessive riches." But Adams had evaded saying whether he thought Izard's objections to the French treaty were well founded.[25]

Adams answered Izard on the second of October. He could not follow the Carolinian's logic with regard to the debt. The mere fact that the United States would have a large debt to be paid would not in itself prevent luxury. Sumptuary laws regulating the importation and the wearing of excessively luxurious clothing, however desirable, would have little chance of enactment. "There is such a charm to the human heart in elegance," he wrote, "it is so flattering to our self-love to be distinguished from the world in general by extraordinary degrees of splendor in dress, in furniture, equipage, buildings, etc. . . . that I fear it will be a work of time and difficulty, if not quite impracticable to introduce an alteration." The inflation of currency, the condition of American trade and the activities of privateers had all operated to stimulate speculation and a growing inequality of fortune. The newly rich were especially aggressive in displaying their wealth.

As to the article itself, Adams, on the soberest consideration, felt that the phrase "indefinite and exclusive" as applied to the fisheries was indeed, as Izard suggested, highly ambiguous and open to several interpretations. For himself, he felt that in such a case precedent should govern and in neither the Treaty of Utrecht nor the Treaty of Paris of 1763, ending the Seven Years' War, had France urged its exclusive rights in the fishery, so it was his feeling that the French treaty "is not justly liable to such a construction, and . . . it cannot be attempted with any prospect of success." He thoroughly agreed with Izard that "as we are young states, and not practiced in the art of negotiation, it becomes us to look into all these things with as much caution and exactness as possible, and furnish ourselves with the best historical light, and every other honest means of securing our rights."[26]

In his enthusiasm for the French treaty, Adams brushed aside impatiently Izard's objections to the eleventh article, which forbade that any duty should be imposed on molasses exported from any French islands to subjects of the United States, a provision which Izard denounced as favoring the "eaters and distillers of molasses"—the New Englanders—over the inhabitants of the Southern states. Article XII provided that, in return, there should be no duties imposed by the United States on "any kind of merchandise" which French merchants might export from the United States to the French West Indies.

In a discussion with Izard, Adams lost his temper and made some scathing remarks about the factions in Congress, remarks which Izard at once relayed to his own friends among the delegates. Moreover, alarmed at Izard's sinister interpretation of the two articles, Congress instructed the commissioners, to their embarrassment, to try to have them struck out of the final form of the treaty. Adams was inclined, at that point, to agree with Franklin that in light of the weakness of America's bargaining position the treaty was an extraordinarily generous one. In it the French court made no effort, as it might very well have done, to secure an especially advantageous position for itself in American commercial affairs. Under the circumstances it seemed niggling and ungracious to dispute particular points, especially when the implication was that France was trying to put something over on her ally and secure by guile privileges that she had not cared to ask for openly. It was not unnatural that the persistent suspicions of Izard, who was not a member of the commission, were irritating to Franklin and to Adams. But Izard had strong friends in Congress and his highly critical report of Adams' attitude toward the treaty and toward Congress weakened John's standing with that touchy group of statesmen.

XXVIII

What time he could take from the business of the commission Adams devoted to study of French manners and customs. He could not get used to the French observance of the Sabbath. They took quite literally the scriptural verse that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. "Sunday, in this country," he wrote, "is devoted to amusements and diversions. There are more games, plays and sports of every kind on this day than on any other in the week." Everywhere he encountered new and ingenuous ways of wasting time. "The inclination and the apparatus in this country for amusement is worthy of observation," he noted. "There is scarcely a genteel house but is furnished with accommodations for every sort of play. Every fashionable house at least has a billiard table, a backgammon table, a chess board, a checker board, cards, etc."[1]

On the road to Versailles from Passy beyond the Seine, not far from St. Cloud, Adams drove past a beautiful palace on a hill, "commanding a prospect as rich and variegated as it was vast and sublime." When he felt himself "more at ease," he inquired about the beautiful mansion. The palace, Bellevue, he was told, had been built by Louis XV for Madame de Pompadour and he had made it his headquarters for twenty years, leaving his Queen at Versailles. The house, noble and gracious, with a lovely view, symbolized the thing he found most troubling about France. So much of the beauty, in his mind, was a façade for corruption. Here one of the great monarchs of his day had flaunted his infidelity, indeed memorialized it. Here in this gorgeous nest of a royal paramour had been carried on the business of the French nation; "here were made judges and counselors, magistrates of all sorts, ambassadors and other foreign ministers, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and popes. . . . Here Voltaire and Richelieu and a thousand others of their stamp obtained royal favor and commissions." Distinguished visitors from all over Europe were received at Bellevue and spread "the fame of this house, its inhabitants . . . infamous in every point of view, civil, political, moral and religious, all over the world. . . . Here *lettres de cachet*, the highest trust and most dangerous instrument of arbitrary power in France, were publicly sold to any persons who would pay for them, for . . . the vilest purposes of private malice, envy, jealousy, revenge or cruelty. . . . Here were sold dukedoms and peerages, and even the *cordon bleu* of the knights of the Holy Ghost." It was small wonder the morals of Frenchwomen were so notoriously loose. The wonder was that there was any morality at all among a people whose King set such an example. At the heart of morality was self-discipline. A people who indulged their appetites without restraint were a people ill suited to govern themselves or to support any orderly and stable government. Certainly the French could not be said to be entirely without morals and they unquestionably possessed what some thought better than morals, "a great deal of humanity, and . . . real benevolence." Their warm and gracious manners, their ready response to others, their flow of sympathy—these things all had a moral base. They showed "a great deal of charity and tenderness for the poor," and even Louis XV, living in sin on a spectacular scale, "had in him the milk of human kindness, and, with all his open, undisguised vices, was very superstitious."[2]

Moreover Adams noted that "the great cardinal virtue of temperance . . . flourishes here more than in any other part of Europe. . . . Such," Adams wrote, "are the inconsistencies of human nature." His New England, stern and dour, had none of this charming responsiveness to life that characterized the French. Stiff, anxious, withdrawn, it was bent on the vast and serious enterprise of saving souls and laying the foundations of an unshakably republican government. And of one thing he was certain. France might make out as best it could, but the American Republic would never survive the erosion of its morals. A republican system was not easily sustained at best. It was the most difficult and demanding, if the most rewarding, of all forms of government. Without a firm moral foundation, it could not endure.[3]

The requirements for a good life seemed simple enough in New England, but in France he was aware, as never before, of a troubling ambiguity. Deeply sensuous, he was disturbed by a culture which laid so many beguiling traps for the senses. Centuries of order had been necessary to enable men and women to live among such a sensate richness. A New Englander must live by the will, weak and imperfect as it was, and here that will, without the support of a clearly defined social order, was in constant peril. This was the root and source of Adams' uneasiness. Moreover, with his obsession about independence, he found France a dependent society. Peasants depended upon their lords, the lords depended upon the court. One class depended upon another; the whole society was tied together by a complex web of dependencies, of family, of status, of favors, tips, bribes, of sweetenings and *pourboires*. Yet with this dependence there was the "benevolence" and humanity which Adams had noted, the sympathy and responsiveness. In his own land, in his native New England, the treasured independence was bought at the cost of a certain coldness, a reserve, a pinching of the spirit that made people touchy and suspicious and awkward in their relations with their fellows.

What perhaps disturbed Adams most about France was the casual attitude of the Frenchwomen toward sexual morality. Men the world over were inclined to be lax and libertine in such matters. Thus it was the women who basically determined the moral standards, especially the sexual standards of their society. "From all that I had read of history and government," he later wrote, "I had drawn this conclusion, that the manners of the women were the most infallible barometer to ascertain the degree of morality and virtue in a nation. All that I have since read and all the observations I have made in different nations have confirmed me in this opinion. The manners of women are the surest criterion by which to determine whether a republican government is practicable to a nation or not." It was notorious that Frenchwomen, whom Adams found so gifted and charming, offered themselves quite casually to lovers. In America such practices would inevitably destroy the fiber of the nation. "Our governors, our judges, our senators or representatives and even our ministers would be appointed by harlots for money," he wrote, "and their judgments, decrees and decisions be sold to repay themselves, or perhaps to procure the smiles and embraces of profligate females." Actually the foundations of all morality lay in the family. "In vain are schools, academies and universities instituted, if loose principles and licentious habits are impressed upon children in their earliest years." The vices and examples of the parents could not be concealed from their children, for the children were extraordinarily sensitive to such matters. There was small chance of the young growing up with a strong set of moral principles if they saw "their mothers live in habitual infidelity to their fathers, and their fathers in as constant infidelity to their mothers."[4]

Though there was something slightly comic in the picture Adams painted of a United States saturated and demoralized by sexual license, it was clear that the extreme colors in which he depicted such a scene were a product of his own anxiety. His attitude was undoubtedly due in part to the fact that his long separation from Abigail and the atmosphere of sophisticated sexuality investing the life of the French court circles made his enforced celibacy hard to endure, whether or not he admitted it. It was also the product of a classical Christian and, more recently, Protestant attitude toward any sexual experience that did not have the sanction of the Church. It was an apprehension based on his knowledge of life in small rural communities. There, where again the naked will sustained the community in some kind of decent and orderly existence, a whole village could become utterly demoralized by a breech in the code of sexual morality. The biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of the plain, was always in the mind of the New England town dweller. We have seen that Adams was no prude in his attitude toward the natural functions of the body, sex included, but his anxiety about sex was based on his own experience as a boy and young man growing up in the town of Braintree. Europe, ancient and wise with the wisdom of the serpent, might survive license and immorality that would mean the ruin of the new Republic of the United States.

"My dear countrymen! How shall I persuade you to avoid the plague of Europe!" he wrote Abigail. "Luxury has as many and as bewitching charms on your side of the ocean as on this; and luxury, wherever she goes, effaces from human nature the image of the Divinity." If power were in his hands, he told Abigail, he would "forever banish and exclude from America all gold, silver, precious stones, alabaster, marble, silk, velvet and lace." The ladies would surely denounce him as a tyrant but he would remind them that true tyrants have "banished, not gold indeed, but other things of greater value, wisdom, virtue and liberty. . . . I am," he added, "with an ardor that words have not the power to express, Yours."[5]

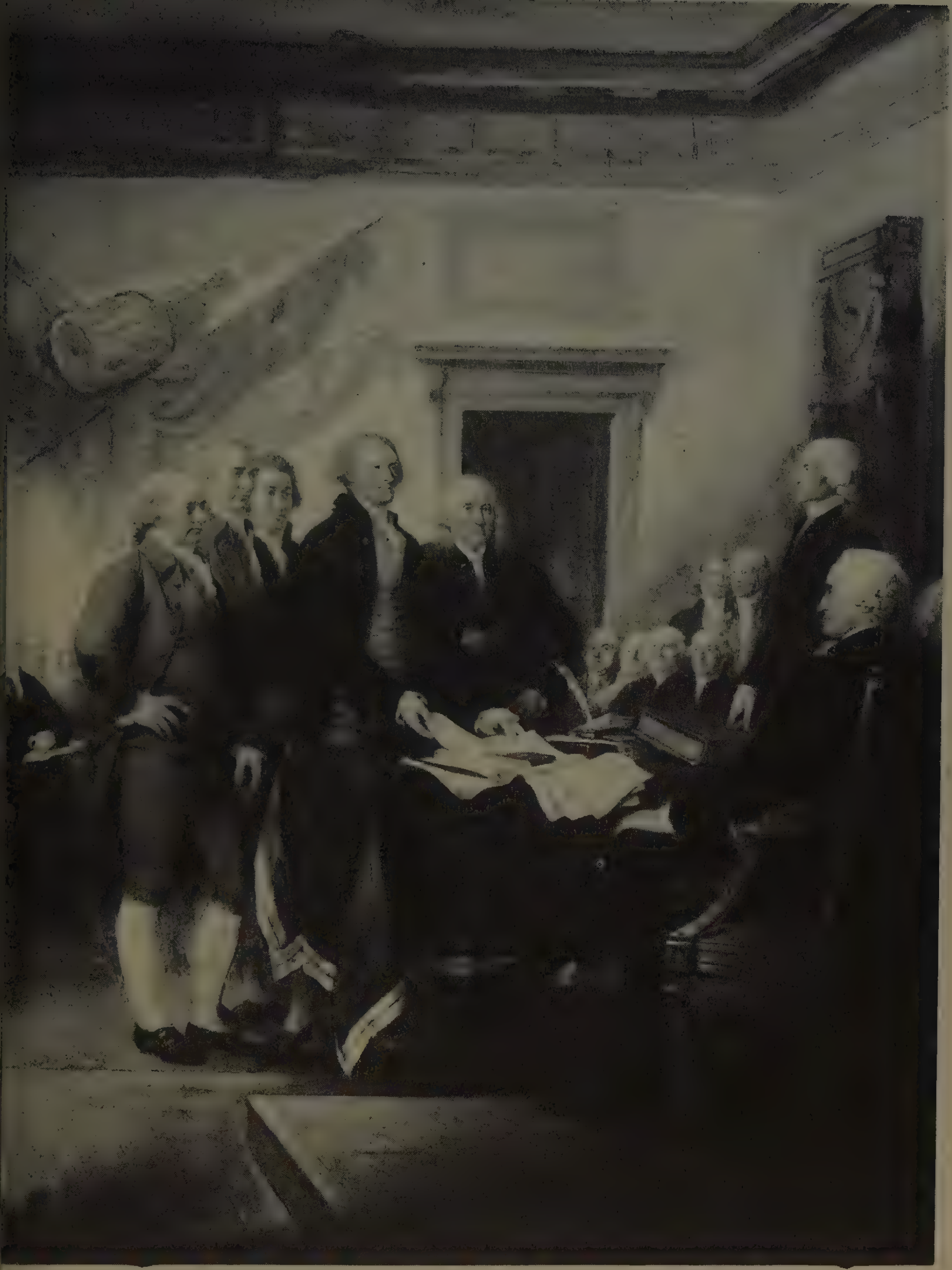
Adams was a curious and fascinated spectator, along with Lee and Ralph Izard, of the grand procession of the Knights *du Saint-Esprit,* or *du cordon bleu.* He watched "the kneelings, the bows and the courtesies of the knights, the dresses and decorations, the King seated on his throne, his investiture of a newly created knight with the badges and ornaments of the order, and His Majesty's profound and reverential bow before the altar." To Adams the most impressive part of the long ceremony was the fact that participants knelt for two hours on the hard marble floor of the chapel. To endure such torment four times a year seemed to Adams much too high a price to pay for a blue ribbon, however honorable; and the Count de Vergennes confessed to him that he almost died from the pain.

While the King went through the arduous ceremony, the Queen sat alone in a gallery opposite the altar. "Her dress was everything that art and wealth could make it," Adams wrote, "encrusted with pearls and diamonds, to the value of eighteen million livres." Her fine complexion, handsome face and carriage and regal manner dazzled John, who found her "an object too sublime and beautiful for my dull pen to describe."

After the ceremony there was a collection for the poor made from the knights by a young lady whose "dress must be as rich and elegant in proportion as the Queen's, and her air, motions and curtsies must have as much dignity and grace as those of the knights." Adams found it "a curious entertainment to observe the easy air, the graceful bow and the conscious dignity of the knight in presenting his contribution; and the correspondant ease, grace and dignity of the lady in receiving it. . . . Every muscle, nerve and fiber of both seemed perfectly disciplined to perform its functions. The elevation of the arm, the bend of the elbow and every finger in the hand of the knight, in putting his louis d'or into the box, appeared to be perfectly studied because it was perfectly natural." Here was the consummate school to teach grace and good breeding, "the perfection of the French air" which, alien as it was to the temper of John Adams, he could not help but admire.

That evening the Americans went on to the *grand couvert* of the royal family and there Adams was singled out for the particular honor of sitting close to the royal entourage. The seats on both sides of the hall were crowded with "ladies of the first rank and fashion in the kingdom"; John, "the raw American," was wedged in among them. In his black court suit amidst the brilliantly arrayed feminine galaxy, his small, stout figure was extremely conspicuous. He felt the eyes of everyone on him. The noble lords and ladies gazed on him, he felt, in much the spirit he and his colleagues had gazed on Indian chieftains come to conclude a treaty with Continental Congress, but since he could not maintain the inscrutable look of a savage sachem, he relaxed and stared back, assuming "a cheerful countenance" and observing the scene around "as coolly as an astronomer contemplates the stars." The occasion of the *grand couvert* was to watch the royal family eat supper. Adams noted that the King himself carved the roast and gave himself a most generous portion. The Queen, for her part, ate her soup with a kind of mechanical grace, glancing about the hall between sips, and displaying to the "admiring spectators the magnificent spectacle of a great Queen swallowing her royal supper. . . . Not a feature of her face, nor a motion of any part of her person, especially her arm and her hand, could be criticized as out of order." While the King was eating, officers brought him letters and papers which he read and commented on. "These ceremonies and shows," Adams noted, "may be condemned by philosophy, and ridiculed by comedy, with great reason," but the fact remained that man was a ceremonious animal. The great acts and moments, the great ideas and principles by which he lived must be embedded in ceremony, so that their power and meaning were readily accessible to everyone. In government or in religion ritual was the means by which men gave form and dignity to their common life. It seemed to Adams, as he considered the significance of all this in a sense absurd mummery, that even the New England will needed the support which ceremonial afforded, the consolation, the dramatic emphasis.[6]

While John Adams moved through the glittering world of the French court, Abigail, in Braintree, tended the farm, tutored the children, wrote letters and, in the absence week after week of any news of her husband, kept up her spirits as best she could. She made a correspondent out of



ATE 9

Courtesy of the Yale University Art Gallery

John Trumbull's picture of the committee assigned to draft a Declaration of Independence submitting the document to Congress. Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, Jefferson, and Franklin made up the committee. Trumbull worked on the picture for eleven years, doing each of the individuals in the picture as a separate portrait from life.

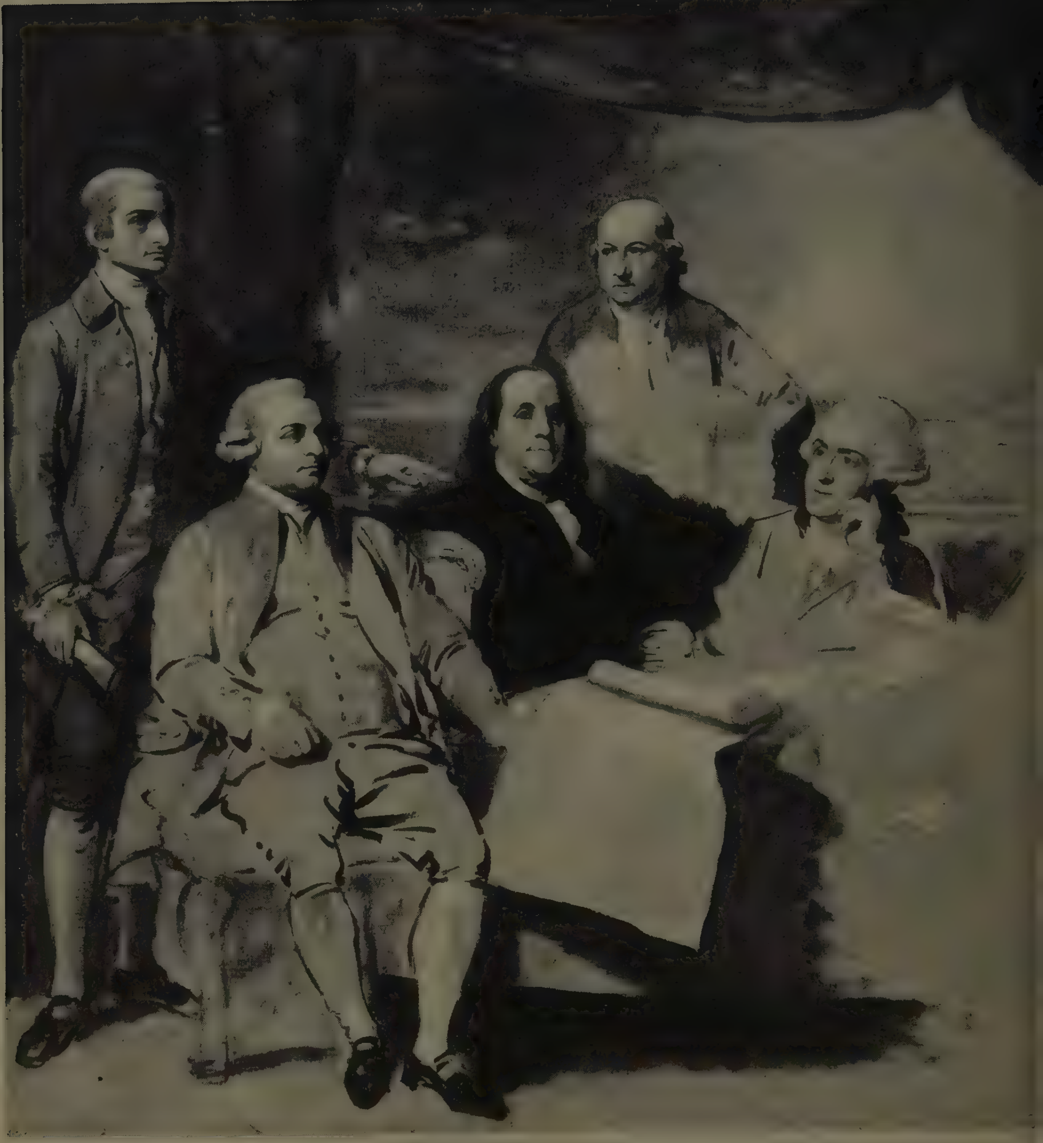


PLATE 10 *Courtesy of the Henry Francis duPont Winterthur Mu*

American Commissioners at the Preliminary Peace Conference with the British negotiators, Paris, 1782, by Benjamin West. The commissioners are, from left to right, John Jay, Adams, Franklin, Laurens, and the Secretary of the Commission, William Temple Franklin. West intended to include the British negotiator, Richard Oswald, and his secretary. Oswald would not pose and there was no portrait from which West could take his likeness so that the picture was never finished.

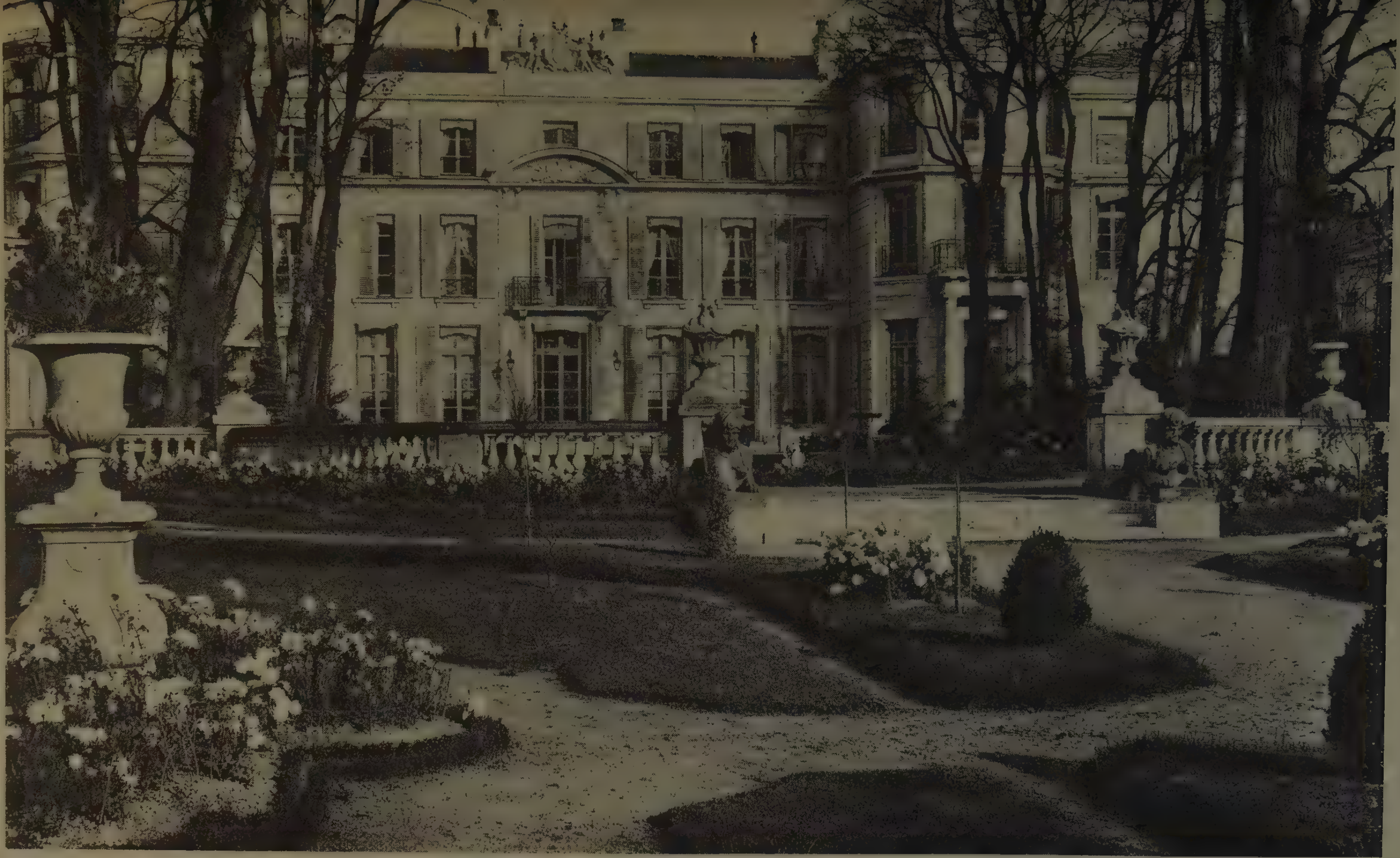
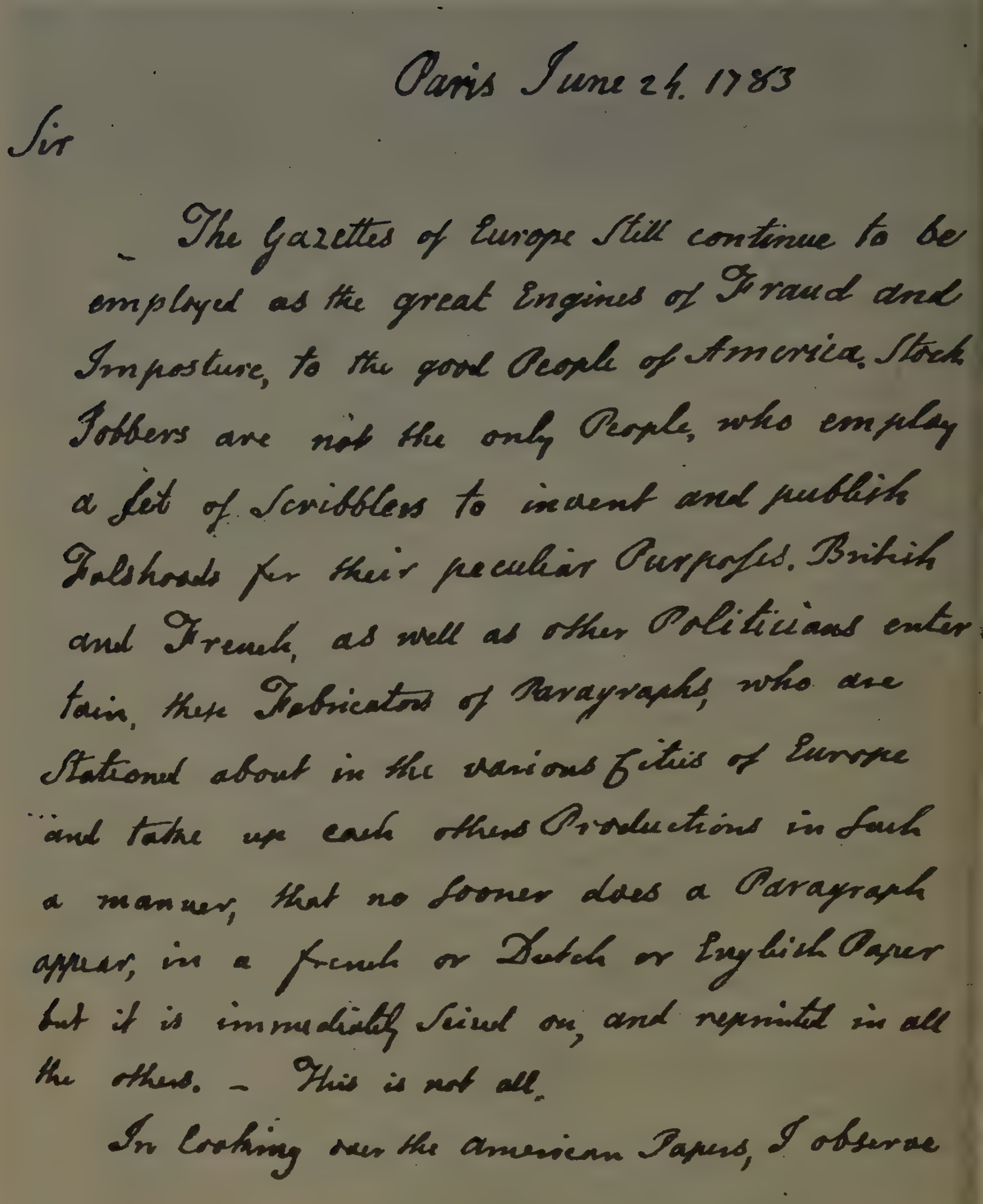


PLATE 11

Photograph from Fernand Girardin "Maisons de Plaisances Françaises, Parcs et Jardins"

Les Verrières at Auteuil, outside of Paris, was rented by Adams from the Comte de Rouhault. "The house is much larger than we have need of," Abigail wrote Mary Cranch; "upon occasion forty beds may be made in it." But she was delighted with the garden—"a beautiful collection of flowers all in bloom."



Paris June 24. 1783

Sir

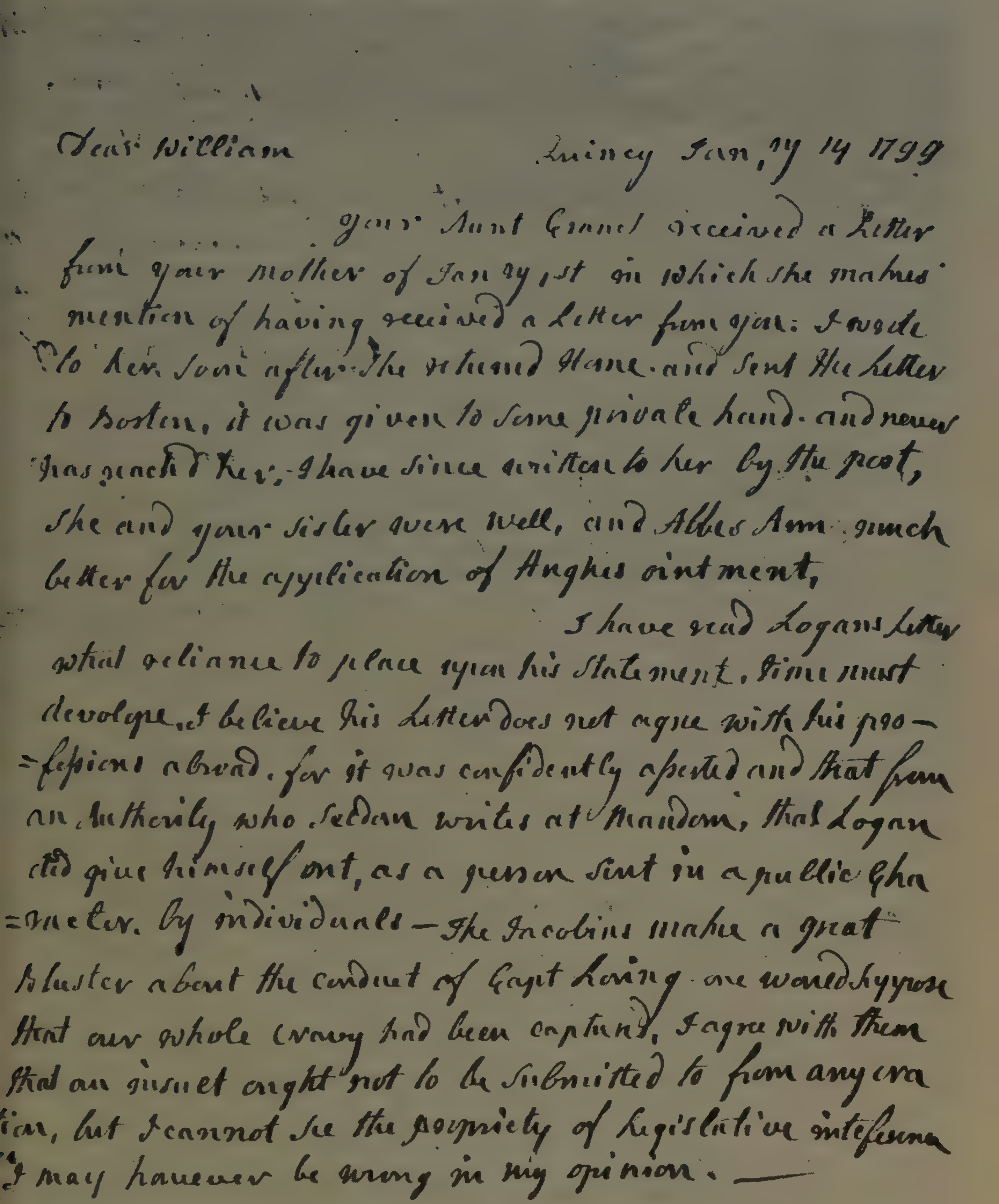
— The Gazettes of Europe Still continue to be employed as the great Engines of Fraud and Imposture, to the good People of America. Stock Jobbers are not the only People, who employ a Set of Scribblers to invent and publish Falshoods for their peculiar Purpoſes. British and French, as well as other Politicians entertain, these Fabricators of Paragraphs, who are Stationed about in the various Cities of Europe and take up each others Productions in such a manner, that no Sooner does a Paragraph appear, in a French or Dutch or English Paper but it is immediately Seized on, and reprinted in all the others. — This is not all.

In looking over the American Papers, I observe

PLATE 12

Library of Congr

John Adams to Robert Livingston, Secretary of Foreign Affairs.



Dear William   Quincy Jan'y 14 1799

Your Aunt Cranch received a Letter
from your Mother of Jan'y 1st in which she makes
mention of having received a Letter from you: I wrote
to her soon after she returnd Home. and sent the Letter
to Boston, it was given to some private hand. and never
has reachd her. I have since written to her by the post,
She and your Sister were well, and Abbe Ann much
better for the application of Hughes ointment,

I have read Logans letter
what reliance to place upon his Statement, time must
develope. I believe his Letter does not agree with his pro=
=fessions abroad. for it was confidently asserted and that from
an Authority who seldom writes at Random, that Logan
did give himself out, as a person sent in a public Cha
=racter. by individuals — The Jacobins make a great
bluster about the conduct of Capt Loring one would suppose
that our whole Navy had been captured, I agree with them
that an insult ought not to be submitted to from any Na
ion, but I cannot see the propriety of Legislative interference
I may however be wrong in my opinion. —

ATE 13

Library of Congress

Abigail to her nephew, William S. Shaw.

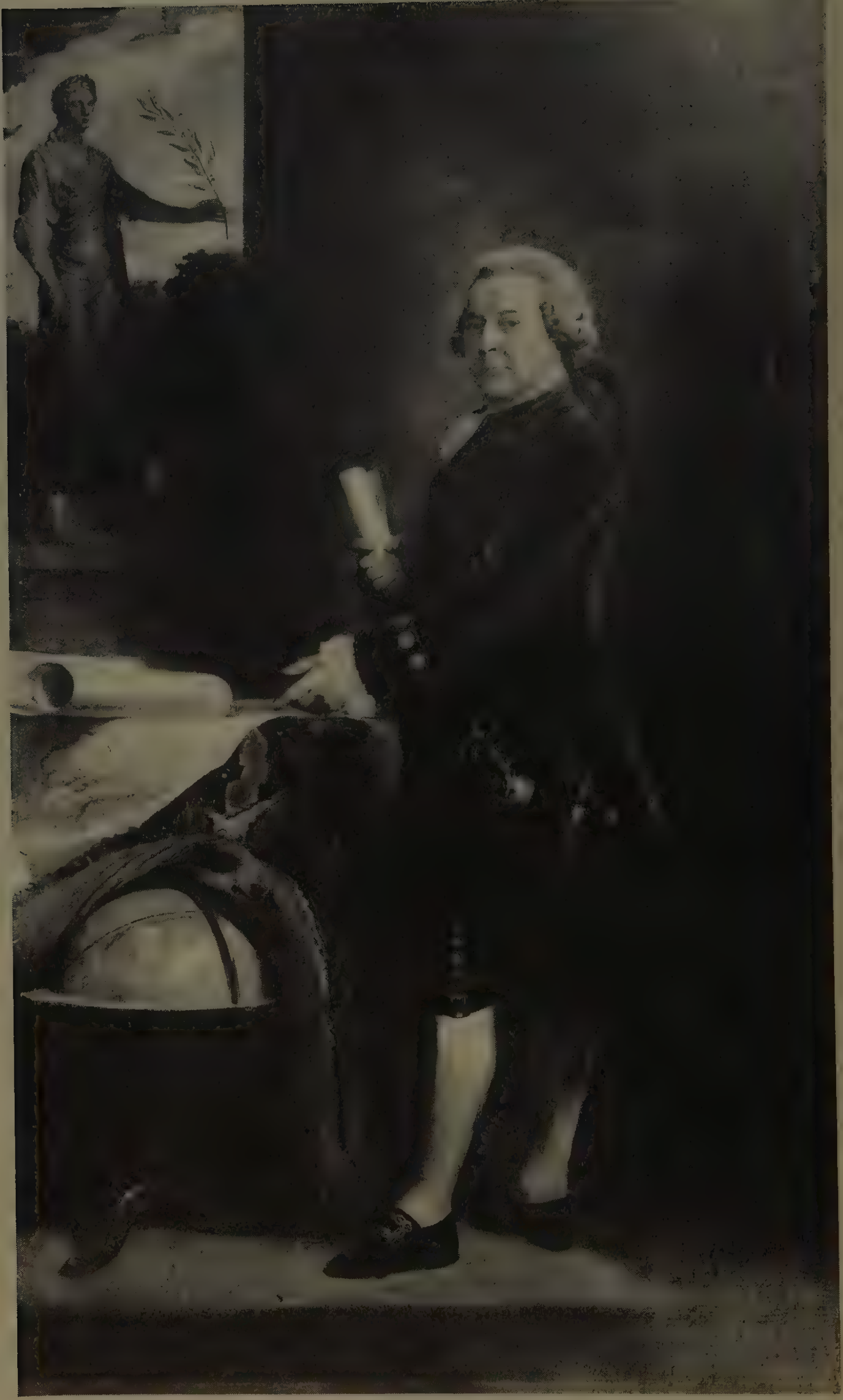
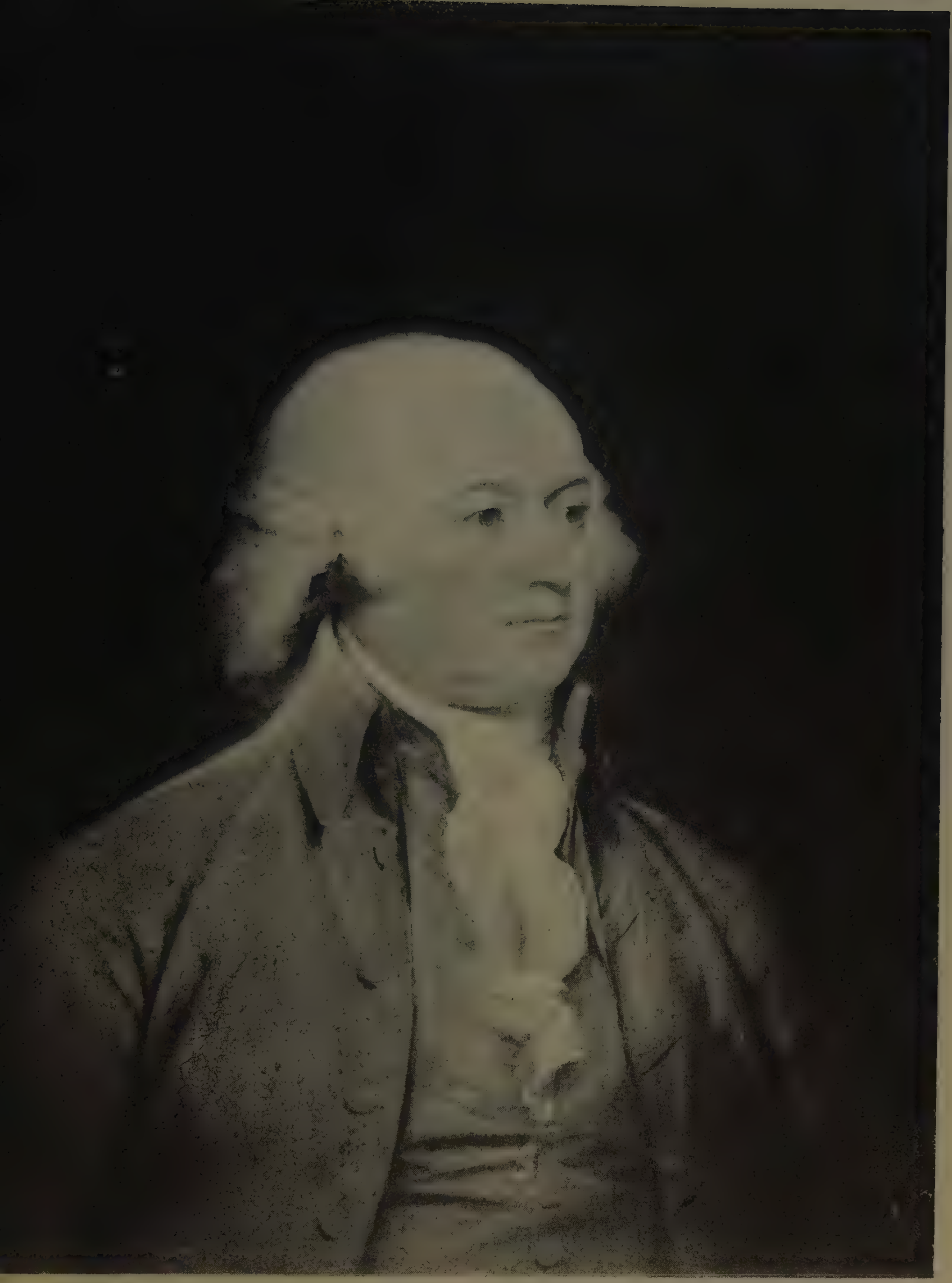


PLATE 14 *Courtesy Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University*

This Copley portrait of John Adams was painted during the latter's visit to England in 1783. Adams wrote John Quincy when his son was in London, asking him to get a frame for the picture: "Thus this piece of vanity will be finished. May it be the last."



E 15

Courtesy Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University

John Adams by John Trumbull. Trumbull went to England to study with Benjamin West. While in London he was a frequent visitor at the Adams' house at Grosvenor Square and it was probably at this time that the portrait was painted.

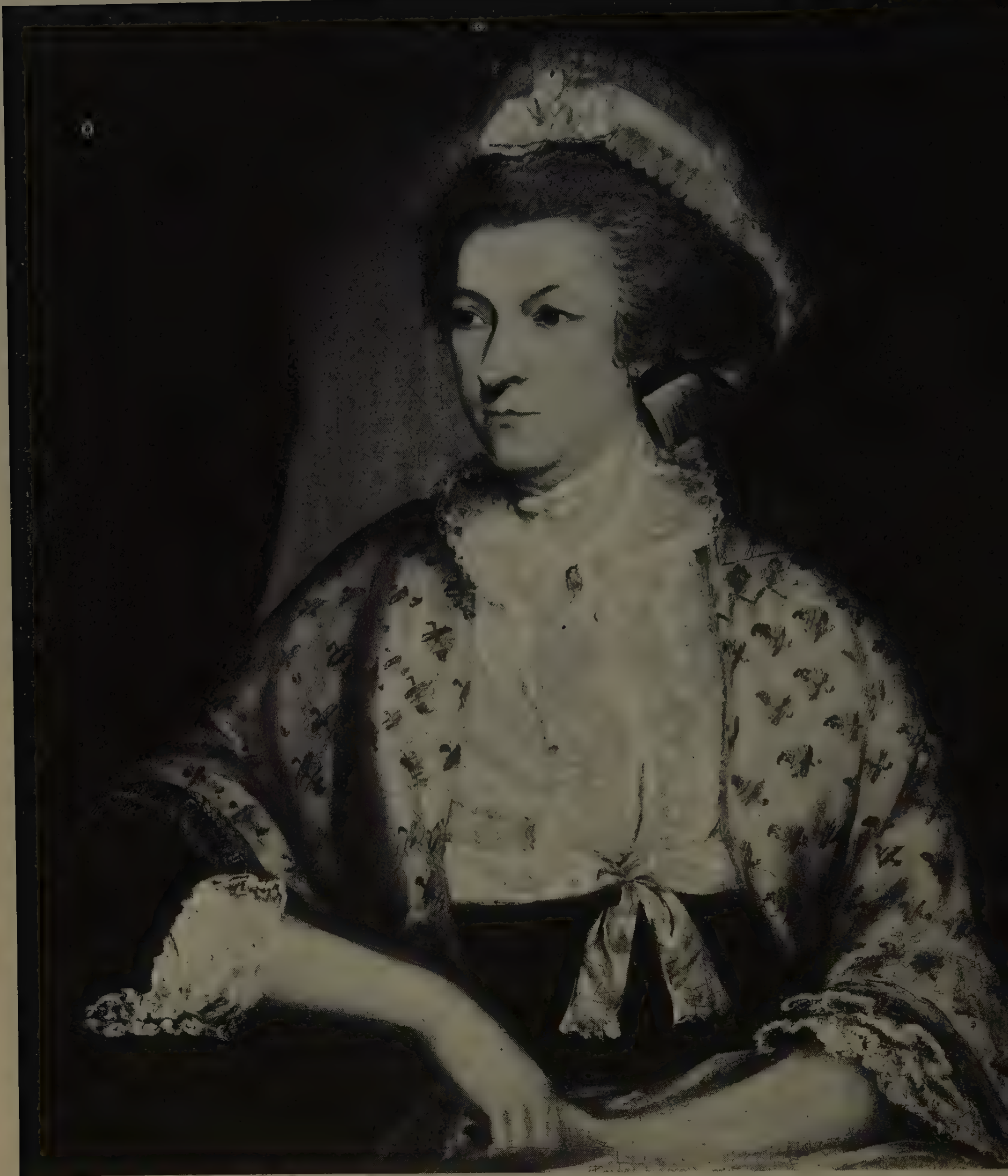


PLATE 16

Courtesy New York State Historical Association, Cooperstow

Abigail Adams by Ralph Earl. Painted by Earl when Abigail was in London in 1785.

John Thaxter, Adams' young law apprentice, and lamented to him that four months had passed since her husband set off and she still had no word that he had reached France. Every vessel that arrived set her "heart upon the wing" longing for a letter. As month after month dragged past without news of her husband and son, Abigail became more and more apprehensive. "O sir, I know not how to curb my impatience," she wrote Thaxter. "I wish a thousand times I had gone with him. . . . No news from the far country—no letters, no vessels, High Ho—ten times an hour I wish I had a bird of passage."[7]

To Abigail's inquiry about the ladies of Philadelphia and his susceptibility to them, Thaxter replied evasively, since "a multiplicity of business [has] prevented any considerable intercourse with them." From what he had seen he had concluded that there was both beauty and sense in the Philadelphian females, but "a cold phlegmatic frame" rendered him "invulnerable to the most poignant shafts of the celebrated bow."[8]

To Thaxter, Abigail divulged her worries that ten-year-old John Quincy would be corrupted by his stay in France; but, she added philosophically, to "exclude him from temptation would be to exclude him from the world in which he is to live, and the only method which can be pursued is to fix the padlock upon the mind." Thaxter was to give James Lovell the message that since he, as a member of Congress, had robbed her of her partner by dispatching him to France, he must take over the task of keeping her informed of everything that went on. "I feel very lonely and miss you exceedingly," she concluded.[9]

Thaxter had sent her a speech by the Duke of Richmond in support of the American cause and Abigail was moved to reflect on the fact that much of the world's present misery was due to the fact that the English aristocracy had abandoned their ancient virtue and given themselves over to their "lusts." James Harrington in his *Oceana* had pointed out that Rome fell when the senators turned knaves and betrayed their trust. The British, like the Romans, had fallen "into every excess of debauchery, grown wicked and effeminate . . . and lost . . . that love of liberty which had acquired them such immortal fame and glory."

James Lovell accepted Abigail's invitation to write with alacrity, and into every letter he inserted his insinuating compliments. Writing to assure her that the widely circulated rumor of Franklin's being assassinated by British agents was false, he added, "If you expect that your griefs should draw from me only sheer pity," he observed, "you must not send them to call upon me in the most elegant dresses of sentiment and language"; indeed, if she persisted in writing such letters, he would be "far more prompt to admire than to compassionate" their author. As for her rebuke to him for sending her improperly intimate letters after her husband had left for France, he pled complete innocence. Much as he admired her, his only wish was for her domestic felicity.[10]

Lovell's letters always came as a shock to Abigail. His outrageous compliments and ardent avowals made her blush, yet pleased her. She felt a guilty twinge reading them. "Amiable though unjust Portia!" he began one such epistle, "doubly unjust!—to yourself, and to me." The absence of ordinary salutation suggested an improper intimacy. But how was one to reply to such subtleties? When she reproved him, he answered quite unabashed, "Must I only write to you in the language of gazettes? . . . Must I suppress opinion, sentiment and just encomium upon the gracefulness of a lovely suffering wife or mother?" Confined to the dull company of "he-creatures, drudging, plodding politicians," he had not realized that his pen had taken liberties that could offend her. Henceforth he would content himself with "secret admiration"; he would continue to esteem her good qualities and overlook her occasional lapses of "calling names and misconstruing the honest sentiments of your sincere humble servant. . . ."[11] And Abigail wrote back, "I begin to look upon you as a very dangerous man . . . a most ingenuous and a public flatterer." Yet the flattery was not unwelcome and she confessed to perusing his letters "with a pleasure which the communicative manner of your writing must always give to your correspondence."[12]

This was all the encouragement Lovell needed, and when Abigail wrote that John had been gone now for ten months and that she missed him desperately, Lovell replied with the inevitable *double-entendre*, congratulating her that her husband's "rigid patriotism" had not left her pregnant once more. "I will take pleasure in your *escape*," he added.[13]

After another sharp rebuke for his "dangerous" compliments, Abigail gave him leave "to make use of whatever expressions he pleases . . . having from further acquaintance with him discovered that the talent for which I formerly censured him is natural to him . . . nor would I rob him of the pleasure he takes in thus indulging the *too pleasing art* [flattery] since I must acknowledge that he is an accomplished proficient in it." Thus pardoned, his next letter was as full of innuendo as ever, expressing regret that he had ever caused "a pressure to your lovely palpitating bosom" by any careless expression of devotion or thoughtless phrase.[14] Her most recent letter, hastily glanced at, had forced from him "almost audibly, in a grave assembly . . . 'gin ye were mine ain thing how dearly would I *love* thee!'"

But a second reading had revealed that what he had mistaken for a declaration of affection on Abigail's part was something quite different—a rebuke to him for his flattery. Yet the first delicious impression lingered on, "nor do I now think," he added, "that one *single* plunge into the waters of Lethe would quite prevent all after recollection of the pleasing impulse which I felt on this occasion." As for Adams, she might think of him at the Louvre, soaking up culture, and concern herself not with what he might do in the wicked French capital but of what she could be sure, from her intimate knowledge of him, he would do—that is, keep his mind on "the mistress of his happiness, *à Portia.*" The insinuation was a subtle one. By assuring Abigail of her husband's fidelity, he might sow a single small seed of suspicion from which might grow a flower that he, Lovell, could in time pick. In the meantime he must find what consolation he could for his too hasty misreading of her letter. "Perhaps in the shade of evening a raven or a screech owl may send voices to my ears," he wrote, "which will attune my nerves for a dirge upon blasted hopes and abortive victory."[15]

In addition to her correspondents, Abigail leaned on Dr. Cotton Tufts for help and advice, on her sister Mary, and her brother-in-law Richard Cranch, upon the General and Mercy Warren, and upon her other sister, Eliza, who had married the Reverend John Shaw, minister at Haverhill. The three sisters, Abigail, Mary and Eliza, were devoted to each other and Mary and Eliza looked to Abigail as model and guide. Eliza, the youngest, wrote of appreciation for her sister's "good sense, piety of heart, sweetness of disposition and greatness of mind which renders you the object not only of my tenderest love but of my veneration."[16]

Abigail could find some solace in writing John Quincy a long letter full of maternal precepts. He was constantly on her mind—his health, his happiness, his education. His trip offered him advantages which he must improve. "The most amiable and most useful disposition in a young mind is diffidence of itself. . . . You are in possession," she wrote, "of a natural good understanding, and of spirits unbroken by adversity and untamed with care. Improve your understanding by acquiring useful knowledge and virtue, such as will render you an ornament to society, an honor to your country and a blessing to your parents." He must in all things follow the precepts and instructions of his father so that he may grow to be a fine and honest man. She would prefer to see him dead rather than "an immoral, profligate or graceless child." Still a child, he had entered "upon the great theater of the world, which is full of temptations and vice of every kind." Vice was the great devouring monster and he must be always on guard against it. The truth he must never lose sight of was this: "That the welfare and prosperity of all countries, communities and, I may add, individuals depend upon their morals."[17]

When word of John finally reached Braintree it was to the effect that the *Boston* had been captured by a British frigate and carried into Portsmouth, England, a prize of war. In the face of such dismal news Abigail's greatest comfort was derived from her faith in a superintending Providence, "since not a sparrow falls to the ground without His notice. Were it not for this," she wrote John, "I would be miserable and overwhelmed by my fears and apprehensions." There was also the consolation of reliving their years together. "Difficult as the day is, cruel as this war has been, separated as I am on account of it from the dearest connection in life, I would not exchange my country for the wealth of the Indies, or be any other than an American, though I might be queen or empress of any nation upon the globe. . . . Beneath my humble roof, blessed with the society and tenderest affection of my dear partner, I have enjoyed as much felicity and as exquisite happiness as falls to the share of mortals." [18]

In the middle of June a British ship was captured by American privateers and brought into Salem. On board was an English newspaper that mentioned the arrival of John Adams, American commissioner, in France. "What have I not suffered for this month past?" Abigail exclaimed in writing when the welcome news reached her. "The fear of your being finally lost daily increased upon my mind, for not the least intelligence could be procured with regard to the *Boston* . . . joy is great on receiving the constant and repeated congratulations of my friends, and in seeing the unfeigned joy of the countenances of all I meet; the vessel was in general given up as taken or lost."[19] The weary months of anxiety were forgotten. "Now that I know you are safe," she wrote, "I wish myself with you." There she might protect him from the French ladies whom he found so charming, lest he enjoy the favors bestowed by the "politico-scientific ladies of France" on his famous colleague.

John's encomiums on the women of France stirred Abigail to a spirited response. "I can hear of the brilliant accomplishments of any of my sex with pleasure," she wrote, "and rejoice in that liberality of sentiment which acknowledges them." But at the same time she must remind him of the "trifling, narrow, contracted education of the females" of her own country. The truth was some exalted critics had praised the judgment of women, particularly in literary matters, for women seemed to have "in general more delicate sensations than men; what touches them is for the most part true in nature, whereas men, warped by education, judge amiss from previous prejudice." Men were full of analogies and comparisons, logical analyses and impenetrable generalizations, where the sympathetic, human response of women was often more accurate, more true to the essence of experience.[20]

Even the news of John's arrival, welcome as it was, did not fill "a craving void . . . in my breast . . . in vain do I strive," she wrote, "to divert my attention, my heart, like a poor bird hunted from her nest . . . still returning to the place of its affections." She only hoped that she was "thus frequently and thus fondly the subject of your meditation," that he took "a few moments everyday from the business and pleasures which surround you in thinking of her who wishes not her existence to survive your affection."

As for the familiarity of the French ladies, Abigail could not refrain from imagining the embarrassment of her "grave American republican" who was not accustomed to such public attentions even from his wife after thirteen years of married life. She could consent, however, to having the French ladies embrace him, "considering your natural fondness for the practice," while she kept possession of his heart. If she was sure her letter would not go astray, she wrote, she would speak her heart more fully.

The letters from John, when they came, were distressingly brief and Abigail took him sharply to task. "Could you," she wrote, "after a thousand fears and anxieties, long expectation and painful suspense, be satisfied with my telling you that I was well, that I wished you were with me, that my daughter sent her duty, that I had ordered some articles for you, which I hoped would arrive, etc., etc.? By heaven, if you could, you have changed hearts with some frozen Laplander, or made a voyage to a region that has chilled every drop of your blood!"

Her finances were in critical condition, she informed John. The prices of things had more than doubled—a barrel of cider was forty-five dollars—taxes were oppressive, labor was virtually unobtainable. She had done everything to economize but she was still desperately in need of money. If John would send her, from time to time, a small trunkful of articles that Dr. Tufts could sell for her in the village, it would be easier to make ends meet. Nabby was in school in Boston and the household which had once consisted of more than a dozen had shrunk to herself, the two boys and two domestics.[21]

In the fall of 1778 there was an exciting event at Braintree which Abigail reported to John. Count d'Estaing, commander of the French fleet which had been sent to American waters, anchored his ships in Boston Harbor and sent his compliments to Abigail, asking if he might meet her at Colonel Quincy's. There the Count invited her and any friends she chose to dine on board his flagship. The next day the ship's barge picked up the little party that Abigail had assembled and carried it out to the *Languedoc*. On board they were "sumptuously entertained, with every delicacy that this country produces, and the addition of every foreign article that could render our feast splendid." After the feast the sailors provided music and the unmarried girls in the party danced with the officers. Abigail was charmed with the "peaceable, quiet disposition" of the officers and men.[22]

In "chastity, temperance, industry, frugality, sobriety and purity of morals," she wrote John, they were impeccable and added to this was a most engaging politeness, so that Abigail confessed that if she had ever had "any national prejudices they are done away and I am ashamed to own I was ever possessed of so narrow a spirit." Indeed, she blushed for the "low vulgar prejudices" of many of her neighbors and friends. She would try to inculcate in her own children "the liberal spirit of that great man who declared he had no local attachments," and who sought for merit wherever it was to be found. "Detested be national reflections; they are unjust," she added.

Abigail wrote to John as often as there was a ship to carry her letters. "Let Stevens know," she wrote, "that his friends are well, and that he has a son about six weeks old. I suppose his conscience will tell him who the mother is." Nabby longed to join her father and brother and Abigail was tempted to send her on board the new frigate, the *Alliance*, which would soon sail for France with General Warren's son as lieutenant of marines.[23]

XXIX

By midsummer Adams was convinced that peace must come soon. England's resources were exhausted. The British fleet under Admiral Keppel had been defeated by the French, and although there was sentiment in Parliament for hanging the unfortunate Keppel, such an act could only emphasize the seriousness of the English disaster. The French treaty, the surrender at Saratoga, Washington's spirited defense of Philadelphia, the presence of a French fleet in American waters under the command of the Count d'Estaing—all these things were bound to dishearten and demoralize the British and hasten the end of the war. If D'Estaing won an important naval victory in American waters, the British might open negotiations for peace within a few months. "Let us sing 'Oh be joyful!'" he wrote Abigail in August, referring to the favorable course of the war.[1]

By fall it was only too apparent that Adams' optimism was groundless. Rumors circulated in Paris that ten thousand of Washington's soldiers had deserted to General Clinton. The Count d'Estaing was reported to have marched through the streets of Boston with the Holy Sacrament and seized a Puritan meeting-house which he had converted into a Romish chapel, to the rage of the citizens of that town.[2] The story was the work of British agents and propagandists. Adams heard that his old nemesis, Thomas Hutchinson, a Tory refugee in England, had convinced the leaders of Parliament that only a fifth of the Americans supported Congress, that Massachusetts was in the hands of the Tories, and that an aggressive effort by the British would bring victory. Instead of becoming dispirited by her setbacks, England seemed more determined than ever to crush her rebellious child. Word reached Adams of fresh and more energetic preparations, of plans to bombard and pillage the seacoast towns of America, to stir up new levies of Tories and Indians, and push the war with greater vigor.

As a consequence, Adams was warning Abigail in November against "the siren songs of peace. . . . You may depend upon it from me (who unhappily have been seldom mistaken in my guesses of the intentions of the British government for fourteen years) that every malevolent passion and every insidious art will predominate in the British cabinet against us. . . . The two houses of Parliament," he wrote, "join ministry and commissioners in threatening fire and sword. They seem to think it necessary to threaten most when they can do least. . . . I suppose they will say as Burgoyne did, 'Speak daggers but use none!'"[3]

Word from Massachusetts was certainly not reassuring. To be sure, Adams' principal correspondent there was James Warren, whose failure to be re-elected to the General Court and whose dislike of Hancock gave him a jaundiced view of affairs, but it seemed evident that the Tories were still numerous and vocal and that Hancock was creating a party of his own and introducing into the government men and principles with which Adams had little sympathy. A good part of Warren's letters were taken up with what he conceived to be Hancock's ambitious maneuverings. "He is making great entertainments and figuring away in a most magnificent manner," he informed Adams. "The eyes of many people are open and see his views and motives, and some of the judicious think nothing necessary but to veer away rope."

Warren warned Adams of the changes he would find in Boston. Fellows that "would have cleaned my shoes five years ago have amassed fortunes and are riding in chariots. Were you to be set down here you could not realize what you would see. You would think you was upon enchanted ground in a world turned topsy turvy, beyond the description of Hogarth's humorous pencil or Churchill's satyr." Also, according to Warren, there was in Congress "a combination political and commercial that would supplant you and all your brethren in Europe if they could. They wish to be able to establish their aristocratic principles and to make their fortunes at the same time." The Southerners, Warren asserted, were ready to sacrifice New England trade and the New England fisheries to secure a peace advantageous to themselves.[4]

Mercy Warren provided a clue to her husband's frame of mind when she wrote that the General, "wearied with the perplexities and embarrassments of public life, sickened by the ingratitude and baseness of mankind, and sighing for the felicity of domestic peace . . . is about to leave the mazy paths of politics and war and return to the still, unvariegated scenes of the sequestered roof." In her gloomy view, "rapacity and profusion, pride and servility, and almost every vice" was abroad. The government was without energy or direction; "some masterly hand (who can trace the sources of human action)" was needed to "take the helm and new form the characters of the people." Perhaps Adams and her husband were the men for the task and when Hancock had fallen one of them, as a true prophet, would rise to take his place.

Mercy, like her husband, spoke ruefully of "the insidious arts of gamblers, courtiers and stock jobbers among ourselves," and of the prominence of the Deanites . . . the votaries of pleasure . . . the men of *taste* and *refinement*." The "old republicans (a solitary few)" kept "their hands unstained by bribes . . . their hearts unshaken by the levity, the luxury, the caprice or whim, the folly or ingratitude of the times" though poverty stared them in the face.[5]

Mercy Warren had requested from Adams portraits of the characters whom he encountered on his mission, but he assured her he did not dare to try his hand at such a dangerous task until he had retired from public life. Then he would "spend all my leisure hours in writing a history of this Revolution, and with a hand as severe as Tacitus, I wish to God it was as eloquent, draw the portrait of every character that has figured in the business." When it was done, he assured Mercy, he would "dig a vault and bury the manuscript with a positive injunction that it shall not be opened till a hundred years after my death."

Mrs. Warren had also inquired whether Adams stood as much in the good graces of the French ladies as Dr. Franklin. "Ah no! Alas, no," he replied. "The ladies of this country . . . have an unaccountable passion for old age, whereas our countrywomen, as you know, madam, have rather a complaisance for youth, if I remember right." This was unfortunate for Adams. He could only wish himself seventy years old in France with the gloomy foreknowledge that when he returned to America he would have to wish himself twenty-five. America, as a young land, worshiped youth; indeed, she made a kind of fetish of it; France, an old land, delighted in the poise and wisdom of age; and John, in middle years, was left dangling in between. He had been introduced a few days before to a French lady with the words, "*Voilà, madame, Monsieur Adams, notre ami, le collègue de Monsieur Franklin.*" "*Je suis enchantée de voir Monsieur Adams,*" the lady replied. When Adams had asked in his textbook French if she cared to dance, the lady had laughed gaily and declared, "*Il est trop jeune.*"[6]

The unhappiness of being separated from Abigail was increased immeasurably by the difficulty of communication. Between February and September 1778, Abigail received only two letters from John out of more than fifty that he had written. Like her, he too had to wait out the long months for word from home. To Abigail's complaints that she heard so seldom from him, he replied that it was impossible for him to write as he had done in America. It was not safe to write anything which he was not willing to have published in all the newspapers in the world; he did not know by whom to send his letters; he was five hundred miles from Bordeaux where most vessels sailed for America and not much closer to Nantes, the other port used by ships sailing westward. Almost every vessel by which he had sent letters and presents for her and the family had been seized by the British. "God knows," he added a little plaintively, "I don't spend my time in idleness, or in gazing at curiosities. I never wrote more letters, however empty they may have been. . . . My friends complain that they have not received letters from me. I may as well complain. I have received scarcely any letters from America. I have written three where I have received one." He had received only a short card from "Mr. Adams," nothing from Gerry, a few short letters from Lovell. Only Warren had written him fully, "several fine, long letters, full of sound sense, useful intelligence, and reflections as virtuous, as wise as usual."

John despaired of getting any merchandise to Abigail. He sent a present by Captain Niles and the vessel was taken by an English privateer. He sent some articles by Captain Barnes and some merchandise by the same ship to Richard Cranch and these too were seized by a British cruiser. Captain Tucker had another small trunk for her on the *Boston;* perhaps this would come through safely. He seized upon the occasion of the refitting of the privateer *General Mifflin* to send a cask of Bordeaux wine, a half dozen pounds of tea and fifty weight of loaf sugar.

Adams, it will be recalled, had hardly arrived in Paris before he began writing his friends in Congress urging that the work of the commission be united under one man and recommending that the man be Franklin. Although it was not until September that Congress decided to commission Franklin as sole representative to the French court, Adams as early as October heard rumors that he was to be reassigned or recalled; at once he began to fret about his fate. If he was to be left in Paris in idleness, he wrote Abigail, or packed off to some country that would not receive him, he would be inclined to come home at once. He had heard rumors, he told her, that "a certain fine gentleman will join another fine gentleman, and these some other fine gentlemen, to obtain some arrangement that shall dishonor me, and by hints that are given out here I should not wonder if I should be recalled or sent to Vienna, which would be worse."[7] In a letter to John, Abigail had reflected ruefully on the slim rewards that came to those who served the public faithfully. In doing so she touched the ever sensitive nerve of her husband's Roman rectitude. The material rewards of public service, he confessed, were indeed small, "but," he reminded her, "if virtue was to be rewarded with wealth, it would not be virtue. If virtue was to be rewarded with fame, it would not be virtue of the sublimest kind. Who," he asked, "would not rather be Fabricius than Caesar?" Or Aristides the Just than even such a noble figure as William III? The virtue which eschewed both wealth and fame was very rare, but the more precious. Nature had recognized the principle by making "more insects than birds, more butterflies than eagles, more foxes than lions, more pebbles than diamonds. The most excellent of her productions, both in the physical, intellectual and moral world, are the most rare." He had little patience with the fashionable French vogue of the equality and perfectibility of man. Men were, to be sure, born equal in rights and, so far as possible, opportunities; equal before God and equal before the law, but in every other way "extremely unequal." The highest virtue, by the same token, was the greatest disinterestedness and the most complete independence. "I would not be a butterfly," he added, "because children run after them nor because dull philosophers boast of them in their cabinets," only out of the sheer joy of such delicacy and beauty.

If he was honorably relieved he would take the first vessel to Penn's Hill, but he would not regret his voyage to Europe, "because," as he put it, "I have gained an insight into several things that I never should have understood without it." France was "a delicious country" with "everything that can soothe, charm and bewitch." But, he added, "these are no enchantment for me. My time is employed in the public business, in studying French like a schoolboy, and in fervent wishes that the happy time may arrive soon when I may exchange the elegance and magnificence of Europe for the simplicity of Penn's Hill, and the glory of war for the obscurity of private contemplation." John Quincy, taking his clue from his father, wrote to his mother that, delightful as Paris was, he "had rather be amongst the rugged rocks of my own native town than the gay city of Paris." To his brother Charles, three years younger, he offered from the perspective of eleven years some sound advice. Their concern was the same—"to qualify ourselves to be useful members of society and to get a living in the world." Charles, while he had lacked the advantages of a stay in Paris, at the same time was "less exposed to vice and folly. . . . We are sent into the world for some end," John Quincy added; "it is our duty to discover by close study what this end is and when we once discover it to pursue it with unconquerable perseverance."[8]

John Quincy was a delight to his father, "a never failing consolation," "the joy of my heart," John wrote. Bright, inquisitive, responsive to his father's constant admonitions, he was a child so handsome and so appealing that he was loved by everyone and made much of.[9] Adams, whose own diary displayed large gaps when he was too taken up with business to make any entries, advised John Quincy to begin, as the latter wrote his mother, "a journal, or a diary of the events that happen to me, and of the characters that I converse with from day to day," adding rather poignantly, "although I am convinced of the utility, importance and necessity of this exercise, yet I have not patience and perseverance enough to do it so constantly as I ought." Adams had also given Johnny a "convenient blank book" to copy his letters into. "I shall have the mortification a few years hence to read a great deal of childish nonsense, yet I shall have the pleasure and advantage of remarking the several steps by which I shall have advanced in taste, judgment and knowledge," John Quincy wrote. He was well aware that the diary and letterbook of an eleven-year-old boy could "not be expected to contain much of science, literature, arts, wisdom or wit, yet it may serve to perpetuate many observations that I may make, and may hereafter help me to recollect both persons and things that would other ways escape my memory."[10]

John Quincy continued to act as preceptor to Charles. Charles must apply himself to the study of French, and the older brother sketched "a little plan for the more easy and effectual acquisition of so elegant and useful accomplishment as that of reading, speaking and writing the French language. Pappa," he added, "laments very much his having neglected this study in his youth in terms so pathetical as to have made a deep impression upon my mind, and I wish to make the same upon yours, that we may both employ those hours which are often spent in frivolous amusements in gaining a knowledge which will make us useful to our fellow men when we grow up."[11]

The letters of her husband that survived all the hazards of the perilous crossing to arrive finally at Braintree did not satisfy Abigail. "My soul is wounded at a separation from you and my fortitude all dissolved in frailty and weakness . . . in vain do I strive to throw off in the company of my friends some of the anxiety of my heart, it increases in proportion to my endeavors to conceal it. . . . The affection I feel for my friend is of the tenderest kind, matured by years sanctified by choice and approved by heaven." John had excused the circumspection of his letters by his fear that they would be intercepted by the British and published. She would not care if a love letter from John to her fell into the hands of the British and was printed for all the world to smile at, so long as the words might some way reach her anxious heart.

The long silence was a torment to her. She was so miserable that even the mention of John's name brought tears to her eyes. She could hardly sit down to write without weeping. "Let me entreat you to write me more letters. . . . They are my food by day and my rest by night. Do not deal them so sparingly to your Portia."[12] The wretched little seed planted by Lovell was, indeed, growing so that she found herself brooding about her husband's apparent "inattention," and then, overcome with remorse, begging his forgiveness "for harboring an idea so unjust to your affection. . . . Were you not," she wrote, "dearer to me than all this universe contains . . . I could not have suffered as I have done." In the midst of her desolation three letters arrived. "I cannot describe the effect they had upon me," she wrote. "Cheerfulness and tranquillity took the place of grief and anxiety." She placed the precious letters next to her heart like a balm and "soothed myself to rest with the tender assurances of a heart all my own."

One of the torments of separation was the misunderstanding it engendered between them. In the fall John received within a week three letters from Abigail complaining of his neglect. He tried to compose a calm answer, but the suggestion that he was indifferent to his wife touched him at his most vulnerable points—his love and his duty. In consequence, his first reply was too impatient and angry to send. His second letter was full of grief and must bring grief to her whom he loved more than life. He tried again and his own sadness and pain at their separation spilled forth in such a torrent of language that he was ashamed of his weakness. He burned all three and contented himself with the warning that if she wrote him further in the same style he must leave off writing entirely—"it kills me! Can professions of esteem be wanting from me to you?" he asked. Typically male, he who loved her so could not understand her need for tender reassurances and protestations. "Am I not wretched enough in this banishment without this?" he cried out to her. How could she ever dare to doubt his complete and absolute devotion, she who had so entwined his heart with hers that they were truly inseparable, truly one? Against such a terrible doubt what would avowals and declarations count? It was impossible that she should doubt, for if it were true that she did, he would not answer for the consequences. She must never again write to him in such a vein. Separated from her by the vast, almost endless stormy and dangerous gulf of the Atlantic, he could not bear to feel the slightest disturbance of that which was the balance and epicenter of his life. In the strength of his emotion, he blurred and blotched the letter and John Quincy, acting as secretary, made a copy in his painstaking hand, tracing out his father's anquished cry of love for his distant mother and feeling as he did so the ache of the separation in his own small bones. When he had finished copying the letter he brought it to his father. John took the sheet from his son, read it over and appended: "This is not a correct copy, but you will pardon it, because it is done by a hand as dear to you as to your John Adams." The husband's devotion was ratified by the son's.

He had to practice the greatest discretion, he insisted. "For God's sake," he wrote, "never reproach me again with not writing or with writing scrips. Your wounds are too deep. You know not, you feel not, the dangers that surround me nor those that may be brought upon our country. Millions would not tempt me to write you as I used. I have no security that every letter I write will not be broken open and copied, and transmitted to Congress and to English newspapers. . . . There are spies upon every word I utter, and every syllable I write. Spies planted by the English, spies planted by stock jobbers, spies planted by selfish merchants, and spies planted by envious and malicious politicians. . . . My life has been often in danger, but I never considered my reputation and character so much in danger as now. I can pass for a fool, but I will not pass for a dishonest or mercenary man. Be upon your guard, therefore. I must be upon mine, and I will."

Abigail wished him "to unravel . . . all the mysteries of the politics of Europe, and all the intrigues of courts. . . . In the first place I don't understand them," he wrote. "In the next if I did I would give the English leave to laugh or swear as much as they pleased if they should catch me in such a folly as that of writing it to your ladyship." Nor could he bring himself to write simply about the frivolities of court life and dress. "For mercy sake don't exact of me that I should be a boy till I am seventy years of age. This kind of correspondence will do for young gentlemen and ladies under twenty . . . but old men, borne down with years and cares, can no more amuse themselves with such things than with toys, marbles and whirligigs. If I ever had any wit it is all evaporated —if I ever had any imagination it is all quenched. Pray consider your age and the gravity of your character, the mother of six children, one of them grown up, who ought never to be out of your sight, nor ever to have an example of indiscretion set before her. . . . If I were to tell you all the tenderness of my heart, I should do nothing but write to you. I beg of you not to be uneasy." Not only was he determined to be reserved himself, but he urged her to consider if some of her letters to him had been intercepted—"what a figure would they have made in a newspaper, to be read by the whole world. Some of them, it is true, would have done honor to the most virtuous and most accomplished Roman matron; but others would have made you and me very ridiculous." That was really too stuffy of John![13]

Yet no one could doubt that hers—the waiter's lot—was the more demanding. As though to demonstrate it, they both sat down the same day, December 27, 1778, to write each other. The night before John and John Quincy had set out from Passy to walk to Paris to see the illumination for the birth of the Queen's daughter, Maria Theresa Charlotte. "Splendid indeed!" a dazzling display of candles by the tens of thousands. "The military schools, the Hospital of Invalids, and the palace of Bourbon were beautiful and sublime indeed; as much so as an illumination can be." It must, John speculated, have cost a million livres. Much as he respected France and "particularly the King and royal family," he could not help thinking "how many families in another country would this tallow make happy for life; how many privateers would this tallow fit out for chasing away the Jersey-men and making reprisals on *Messieurs les Anglais!* The King and Queen are greatly loved here," he added. "Every day shows fresh proofs of it." Across the Channel was a King whose subjects must soon hate him, if they did not do so already, and their hate would doubtless shake his throne. John Bull might bully and bluster, he wrote, "but John will come off wretchedly. He will be beaten. He has been beaten. There have been more British men-of-war already taken and destroyed than they lost in two former wars, and more sailors prisoners."[14]

While John wrote of illuminated buildings and brilliant celebrations, Abigail wrote of the bleakness of her life. "How lonely are my days! how solitary my nights secluded from all society but my two little boys and my domestics. By the mountains of snow which surround me, I could almost fancy myself in Greenland." The weather had been bitterly cold and the wind, blowing at hurricane velocity, had driven every man and beast to house and barn and piled the roads deep in drifted snow. Nabby was at Plymouth with the Warrens, and the little, storm-shrouded house was as quiet as a grave. There was no familiar, firm, quick step in the hall or upon the stair. A few days before a young friend, stopping by to visit and divert Abigail, had sung a Scottish song to cheer her up, but the effect had been quite the opposite. "The native simplicity of it," she wrote John, "had all the power of a well-wrought tragedy." When Abigail had stopped her tears she asked her visitor to sing it again and set Charles to learning it by heart: "'His very foot has music in it,/As he comes up the stairs.' How oft," she added, "has my heart danced to the sound of that music!" And then, again, her own cry to him: "'And shall I see his face again?/And shall I hear him speak?' Gracious Heaven! hear and answer my daily petition, by banishing all my grief."[15]

Whether Heaven or Continental Congress might properly claim the credit, John was able to write her soon that he was coming home. "I shall . . . soon present myself before you, your own good man." Lovell had written him that Congress had decided to follow Adams' "ideas of distributing the gentlemen abroad." The delegates were determined to make Franklin minister plenipotentiary to the French court and find other assignments for Lee and Adams. Adams should not, Lovell declared, take the fact that no new assignment was voted at that time as a criticism of his performance of his duties as a commissioner. "The delay of republican assemblies is the only thing against you"—that was to say, the maddening procrastination of Congress. "Your character is esteemed."[16]

Although there were persistent rumors that Congress would order him to Holland and Franklin advised him to wait in Paris for further orders, Adams determined to go home as quickly as he could procure a passage. He wrote at once to Sartine requesting passage for himself, his "little son," and his servant, Stevens, on any man-of-war sailing for American waters. "Happy, happy indeed shall I be once more to see our fireside," he wrote Abigail. He found the Scottish song as moving as Abigail had and put Johnny, "Dr. J.," to copying it so he might, like little Charles, sing it for his parent. "Oh my leaping heart!" he added. Then, to tease: "I must not write a word to you about politics, because you are a woman.

"What an offense have I committed! A woman!

"I shall soon make it up. I think women better than men, in general, and I know that you can keep a secret as well as any man whatever."

The day after he sat down to wish his distant wife a "happy new year and many happy years, and all the blessings of life. Who knows," he added, "but this year may be more prosperous for our country than any we have seen? For my part I have hopes that it will. Great blessings are in store for it, and they may come this year as well as another. You and I, however, must prepare our minds to enjoy the prosperity of others, not our own. In poverty and simplicity we shall be happy, whenever our country is so. Johnny sends his duty."[17]

Despite all his worry and hard work, the French climate and, above all, French food had agreed with him. Now that he was going home, they seemed doubly charming. "I admire the Parisians prodigiously," he wrote. "They are the happiest people in the world, I believe, and have the best disposition to make others so." With his family and an income of a hundred thousand livres a year, he would gladly spend his life in Paris. "The cookery and manner of living here, which your Americans were taught by their former absurd masters to dislike," he added, "is more agreeable to me than you can imagine. . . . There is such a choice of elegant entertainments in the theatric way, of good company and excellent books that nothing would be wanting in this country but my family and peace to my country, to make me one of the happiest of men."[18]

So John, at last, had succumbed, completely and entirely, to the eternal mistress, Paris. What of stony, rugged Braintree and republican virtues? He would return to them, loyal and still loving, but for a moment he must let himself go and surrender completely to this softer mistress. He dined with and entertained the greatest philosophers in Europe, conversed with the Abbé Raynal—"the most eloquent man I ever heard speak in French," learned, witty, endlessly entertaining, with "spirit . . . eloquence and fire"; with Monsieur Turgot, the great financier and economist, with the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, grandson of the great moralist, and a dozen others. Here were intellectual feasts to match the culinary ones. Adams found himself, a provincial lawyer, accepted among such men as an equal. They listened to his labored French respectfully and professed to find merit and originality in his ideas and opinions. He wrote to Richard Henry Lee that while he disapproved of the ostentation of the French court "he must be of a strange disposition who cannot be happy at Paris where he may have the choice of all the pleasures, amusements and studies which human life affords."[19]

XXX

IN THE United States, Congress, already seriously divided by dissensions in the army, most of which revolved around the foreign officers that Deane and Franklin had sent over in such numbers, had been, if possible, more bitterly split by Deane's return. Richard Henry Lee naturally supported his brother Arthur, and the adherents of Deane in Congress attempted to vindicate their man. The efforts of the latter faction were complicated by the fact that William Carmichael, a member of the Lee-Izard "privy council," returned and took his seat in Congress, from which vantage point he resumed his warfare against Deane and, as far as he dared, against Franklin.

Deane, in the meantime, prejudiced his own cause by the general accusations that he broadcast and by the increasing rancor with which he pressed his own claims before Congress. All business of that body was interrupted while he presented his defense. The fact that he could produce no vouchers and accounts to reinforce his cause made his position a weak one. Congress was stalemated. To clear Deane would be, by implication at least, to indict Lee and Izard. To find him guilty of misconduct would be to impeach, again by inference, his colleague and friend, Benjamin Franklin. Faced by such a dilemma and in danger of running aground on the whole unhappy controversy, Congress tried to brush the dispute under the rug. The issue was tabled, but Deane was unwilling to let the matter lie there. He demanded a complete exoneration. If Congress was not satisfied with his conduct as a commissioner he should be allowed to return to France to secure those papers which would clear him of all imputations. Since he had been called home without a clear idea of the charges against him, he had left behind papers which would have made clear his innocence.

To this not unreasonable proposition Congress seemed inclined to accede; but Deane, prompted by an impulse to self-destruction, turned from Congress to the people and wrote and published in the newspapers a long, rambling attack on his detractors, full of insinuations of evil-doing and chicanery. This address to the people of the United States at once carried the issue far beyond the relatively simple question of Deane's guilt or innocence. He was, in effect, questioning the authority of Congress, attacking its integrity, impugning the motives of its agents and spreading before the world the angry contentions that had inhibited its counsels and darkened its deliberations.

The only effect was to justify his enemies and dismay his friends. Tom Paine, still in the employ of Congress, undertook to answer Deane in an indiscreet pamphlet which revealed the extent of the secret French aid that had been given America before the treaty of amity and commerce. Gérard, the new French Minister to Congress, protested vigorously and Henry Laurens, a natural partisan of Lee and Izard, resigned as President of Congress when that body refused to censure Deane's appeal.

When Adams read it he exploded. This was the kind of viper that Franklin had nourished in his bosom; this was the man who had abused and denounced Arthur Lee. Adams' natural sympathies, which had been drawn to the Lee faction and which he had with difficulty held to a nominal impartiality, now flowed unchecked from the Franklin camp to that of Izard and Lee. Encountering Franklin and William Temple, he spoke of Deane's performance "with great freedom and perhaps too much warmth"—most certainly an understatement. "It was," he declared, crimson with indignation, "one of the most wicked and abominable productions that ever sprang from a human heart!" If Franklin and his supporters in Congress defended such behavior it would be better for the French alliance to be broken off at once than to divide and demoralize America. "No evil could be greater," he said, his voice raised to a shout, "nor any government worse, than the toleration of such conduct."

For once Franklin seemed discomfited. He sat in silence through the tirade, but it did nothing to strengthen the ties between him and the outraged New Englander. The same day Adams encountered Dr. Bancroft, Silas Deane's sometime teacher and warm friend, and gave that gentleman a broadside. Deane's address, he declared, could only have been the product of a combination of "vile passions, of vanity, arrogance and presumption, of malice, envy and revenge, and at the same time of such wickedness, indiscretion and folly as ought to unite every honest and wise man against him." It meant either the ruin of Deane or of his country; Deane was like a wild and dangerous boar that should be hunted down for the benefit of mankind. He, Bancroft, knew very well that Adams had tried to be scrupulously fair to Deane, but now he had abandoned him to Satan.

Like Franklin, Bancroft could do little but ride out the storm. However the British spy must have derived a good deal of inner satisfaction at the damage that his former pupil had done to the American cause. Adams, recording his outburst in his diary, noted, "In all this it is easy to see there is too much declamation"; but in essence his position was just, and he added, "I will abide by [it], unless future evidence, which I don't expect, should convince me of any error in it." He wished for "anything to divert melancholy and to soothe an aching heart. . . . The uncandor, the prejudices, the rage among several persons here make me sick as death," he wrote. Arthur Lee and Ralph Izard, Adams confessed, were men "whose prejudices and violent tempers would raise quarrels in the Elysian fields, if not in heaven." Lee was so bitter and sour and had "so few of the nice feelings that God knows what will be the consequence to himself and to others." Wherever Adams went the subject of Deane's address was discussed and Adams defended the integrity if not the temper of Arthur Lee. There was no man in Paris that he dared to trust. "They are all too much with passions and prejudices and party disputes," he wrote. "Some are too violent, others too jealous, others too cool and too reserved at all times, and at the same time, every day, betraying symptoms of a rancor quite as deep. The wisdom of Solomon, the meekness of Moses, and the patience of Job, all united in one character, would not be sufficient to qualify a man to act in the situation in which I am at present; and I have scarcely a spice of either of these virtues."[1]

He wrote to Abigail in February 1779 that he had been hitherto impartial, trying "to search for nothing but the truth, and to love nobody and nothing but the public good. I have hoped," he added, "that animosities might be softened, and the still small voice of reason heard more and the boisterous roar of passions and prejudices less." But Deane's address had changed all that. Now the scar was ripped open before the world. Deane and his adherents had sacrificed all right to a fair and judicious hearing. "With all my professions of impartiality I confess myself wholly against this man . . . his narrow capacity and his immeasurable vanity . . . sublety and intrigue. . . . To him it is chiefly owing that Americans are tearing one another's character in pieces in this country, mutually laboring to make each other appear to be knaves, and a great part of the world is now complaisant enough to take us all at our word."[2]

Reading accounts of the storm stirred up by Deane, Adams had the feeling that the whole confederation was imperiled. If one man could get away with such open defiance of the only Continental authority—Congress—and do so without reproof or rebuke, it seemed to him "that the confederation was wholly lost . . . it appeared to me that it would wholly lose us the confidence of the French court . . . that it would have the worst effects upon Spain, Holland, and in England, besides endangering a civil war in America." In the midst of his alarm and dismay, word reached him that Franklin had been made sole plenipotentiary to the French court. A vast weight was lifted from his mind. "Now," he wrote, "business may be done by Dr. Franklin alone; before, it seemed as if nothing could be done."

The single commission for Franklin removed many of the dangers Adams had feared from the effect of Deane's address. "Leaving the doctor here alone is right," he added, "and . . . Mr. Lee is a very honest and faithful man." "Every suspicion," he wrote Sam Adams, "of a wavering disposition in this court concerning the support of American independence is groundless, is ridiculous, is impossible. . . . If the voice of popularity is anything, I assure you that this voice was never so unanimous in America in favor of our independence as it is here. . . . Common sense in America supported independence; common sense in France supports the alliance, and will support it to the last."[3]

At the same time he wrote to Vergennes, announcing that he had been relieved of his assignment as commissioner and planned to return to the United States. Vergennes, who had never cared much for Adams, replied graciously. He and the King felt "esteem and consideration" for Adams. His Majesty had received "particular satisfaction . . . from the wise conduct you have held during the whole time of your commission, as well as the zeal you have constantly displayed both for the cause of your country and for the support of the alliance which attaches it to His Majesty." Adams replied in the same terms. The "indulgent sentiments" of His Majesty, he assured Vergennes, would "be preserved by me and my posterity as a most precious monument."[4]

To Adams' inquiry about a passage to America, Sartine, the Minister of Marine, replied promptly, suggesting that Adams make plans to return on the *Alliance*, sailing from Nantes in March. Adams, after paying his respects to the King and taking leave of Vergennes in an interview conducted in French, where, as he put it, "I found I could talk as fast as I pleased," traveled with John Quincy, Stevens and their baggage to Nantes to board the French frigate for home.

At Nantes, Adams discovered that the *Alliance* was at Brest involved in a protracted and at least for the moment fruitless negotiation over the exchange of prisoners. Adams decided to go to Brest to try to expedite the sailing of the *Alliance* and the swapping of its captured British sailors for Americans. After several weeks of conferring with the various French officials at Brest he concluded the negotiations and cleared the way for the *Alliance* to sail to Nantes for final fitting.

At Nantes, John and John Quincy made themselves as comfortable as they could aboard the *Alliance*. Captain Landais, the commanding officer, was a bilious and discontented man at odds with his officers and his men, and the ship was not a happy one. It seemed Adams' fate, wherever he went, to encounter among Americans poor discipline, disorder and contention. When so much was at stake, when such a glorious cause was contended for, it was unbearable that there should be so many petty wrangles and bitter disputes. Was the whole Revolutionary enterprise to be riddled and discredited before the world by such unseemly performances? It was again the lack of respect for authority, the unwillingness to accept rank and subordination as part of the orderly working of any institution or organization which brought the trouble. Paradoxically, that was part of the passion for independence, personal as well as national.

Landais, Adams discovered, had been disappointed in love and in his naval ambition and he spoke at some length on both subjects. "He seems not to know," Adams observed, "how to gain or preserve the affections of his officers, nor yet how to keep them in awe." The Captain's imperfect knowledge of English and his gloomy recital of his frustrations helped to destroy any respect for him and undermine his authority. He was "an absent, bewildered man, an embarrassed mind," Adams perceived. His officers, Landais told John, were in a plot against him. His moodiness, his forbidding air, his suspicious stares, all gave evidence of his instability. In diagnosing his inadequacies as a commanding officer, Adams noted that he vacillated too much between inflexibility and softness. "This is an honest man," he noted, "but chagrin and disappointment are visible in everything about him; he is incapable of all art; he has no address or dexterity at all in managing men."

Fretting over the poor discipline on board, Adams felt more than ever that "art and design" were essential if one was to accomplish anything of consequence in the world—that is, some guile, some tact, some management of men and occasions. He was convinced of "the innocence, the virtue and absolute necessity" of being "political." Since one lived in a real rather than an ideal world, the art of compromise and arrangement must be developed if things were to be accomplished. He had seen the Virginians and others of his colleagues in Congress, Samuel Adams among them, practice their arts of persuasion and political maneuver. He recalled Eben Thayer operating in town meetings; he had always scorned such manipulation as inconsistent with his cherished integrity. His only technique was to put his head down and plow ahead, armed with nothing more than a conviction of the rightness of his cause. It was a bruising method of operation, bruising to Adams' opponents and to himself. It made him as many enemies as friends and left his allies frequently as sore and abraded as himself. He had arrived at the age of forty-four, he noted ruefully, without learning to employ "art and design." Partly it was principle, partly a quality of temperament that simply made it impossible for him to utilize the subtler political arts, however much he might acknowledge their usefulness and validity.

By such thoughts he was led on to a rather morbid inventory of his own deficiencies as a leader of men. He wrote in the diary, "There is a feebleness and a languor in my nature." (His acquaintances would certainly have been hard put to it to discern much "languor.") "My mind and body both partake of this weakness. By my physical constitution I am but an ordinary man. The times alone have destined me to fame; and even these have not been able to give me much." When he examined himself in the mirror his eyes, his forehead, his cheeks and lips betrayed his basic weakness of body and character. Instead of straight, firm lines, cold, determined eyes, commanding brow, his plump face seemed to him to be made up of distressingly soft curves and bulges. Instead of the stern, tight mouth and resolute countenance of a Roman senator he saw the familiar features of a rather round, distressingly expressive and sensuous face, a face ready to betray him at a moment's notice, ready to reveal chagrin, embarrassment, rage or delight before its master could draw the features into a proper façade of stoicism and cool reserve. It was clearly not the face of a classic hero. He found comfort in the fact that "some great events, some cutting expressions, some mean hypocrisies have at times thrown this assemblage of sloth, sleep and littleness into rage like a lion. Yet," he added, "it is not like the lion—there is extravagance and distraction in it that still betrays the same weakness."[5]

The time that was not taken up trying to promote harmony on board the *Alliance* or spent wining and dining with American merchants and listening to their often tedious complaints Adams spent with John Quincy exploring the port, walking across the bridges which connected the islands in the river's mouth and exploring the adjacent countryside. "The mixed appearance of houses, meadows, water and bridges is very uncommon and amusing," he wrote. He saw a good deal of Joshua Johnson, an American merchant whom he found congenial, and Jonathan Williams, Franklin's nephew, and went with them to the Comédie to see the *Barber of Seville*. The provincial theater was not to be compared with that of Paris. The audience, "not very clean nor sweet," crowded onto the stage, and the actors were mediocre.

With his departure apparently near at hand, Adams could not forbear to reflect that while "the pleasure of returning home is very great . . . it is a mortification to leave France." He had only recently started to feel at home in this world so remote in spirit as well as space from his New England hearth. He knew enough of the language to follow and participate in French conversations, to understand the plays, read the newspapers, gossip with the postmasters, postilions and tavern-keepers, to comprehend the "prattle of the shopkeeper," or some gentleman encountered in traveling. At the taverns he encountered "sharpers, gamblers, quack doctors, strolling comedians . . . people of all characters." In such company, not too dissimilar to that of his own Massachusetts taverns, Adams found much pleasure and diversion. The female shopkeepers, with their ready flow of expressive French, delighted him. He poked and pried, talking in his laborious French to whomever he could engage in conversation.[6]

Much of the weary time of waiting was devoted to John Quincy's schooling. Adams spent hours with the boy working patiently over Latin translations. "Yesterday and today, in the forenoon," he wrote in the diary, "assisted my son in translating Cicero's first Philippic against Catiline." In addition to Cicero, John Quincy, under his father's direction, translated into English the French preface to the Philippics of Demosthenes. To read Tully's orations was "an agreeable amusement," but enough of Tully was definitely enough; time, even with his self-imposed duties as a tutor, hung heavy on Adams' hands.

Some of the tedium was relieved by the engineer of the *Alliance,* who instructed the two Adamses, father and son, in the basic principles of architecture. He described the five orders—the Doric, Ionic, Tuscan, Corinthian and Composite, beginning in each case with the pedestal, then the column, the capital and the ornaments. Having mastered civil architecture, one could go on to naval and military. The engineer showed John Quincy the kind of pen and ink to use to render architectural drawings, the way to hold his hand, and how to sit.

On April 28 after more than a month of waiting word came from Sartine that the mission of the *Alliance* had been changed, that the ship would not sail for some time, and that Adams, if he wished passage home, should go to L'Orient with the *Alliance* and ship on the *Sensible,* a French frigate scheduled to sail for America in July. The delay was a cruel disappointment; to exchange May for July when he had counted every hour until his return was a blow.

The *Alliance* arrived at L'Orient before a fine, light breeze and anchored in the spacious harbor. Adams went with Landais and John Quincy to visit Paul Jones on board the *Bon Homme Richard.* Adams knew of course about Jones's spectacular raids off the British coast, and as a commissioner he had dealt with the volatile Captain's demands and complaints. Jones had decided, quite without foundation, that Adams was his enemy and referred to him as "that wicked and conceited upstart," and contemptuously as "Mr. Roundface." Adams was not aware of Jones's attitude and, even if he had been, would doubtless have ignored it since he was willing to forgive almost anything in an officer who ran a tight ship and beat the British. He dined the following day with Jones, his officers and a company of American merchants. Although the conversation was not "very instructive," the company followed the "old American custom of drinking to each other," which Adams always enjoyed. One of the diners observed that there were two ways to learn French—to take a mistress or go to the Comédie Française. At this sally the ship's surgeon turned to Adams and said with an impudent grin: "Pray, sir, which, in your opinion, is the best?" Adams, who had heard the rumors of Paul Jones's *amours,* might better have referred the question to the Captain, but he answered lightly and without irritation: "Perhaps both would teach it soonest; to be sure, sooner than either. But," he continued in a mildly admonitory manner, "the language is nowhere better spoken than at the Comédie. The pulpit, the bar, the Academy of Sciences and the faculty of medicine—none of them speak so accurately as the French Comédie." After dinner Adams went to see Jones's marines, dressed in smart red and white uniforms, go through a drill. He sized up the wiry little officer with the small, delicately poised head and sharp features quite neatly. "This is the most ambitious and intriguing officer in the American navy," he wrote. "Jones has art and secrecy, and aspires very high." The man's character was revealed in the uniforms he had designed for himself and his officers—golden buttonholes for himself; two epaulettes instead of the one designated by Congress; his marines dressed in red and white instead of the prescribed green. "Eccentricities and irregularities are to be expected from him. They are in his character, they are visible in his eyes. His voice is soft and still and small; his eye has keenness and wildness and softness in it."[7]

At L'Orient there was more waiting. The Chevalier de la Luzerne, the new minister plenipotentiary to the United States, was to sail on *La Sensible* and the Chevalier was delayed in arriving at the port. Adams, impatient as always, found that the life of dining and talking with American naval officers and merchants in L'Orient, with Jones and Landais and his Passy friend, Chaumont, began to pall. He stayed on board the *Alliance* reading *Don Quixote,* tutoring John Quincy, and fretting over the delay. "My state is tedious enough," he noted in the diary, "waiting for the Chevalier, and losing time and wind. Expectation is a painful posture of the mind; and suspense, which is a little different, is worse."

On the eighth of June, Adams transferred his belongings, himself, son and servant to *La Sensible* without regrets. The *Alliance* was an unhappy ship. The Captain remained at loggerheads with his crew and Adams was glad to be rid of him. Four days later Luzerne arrived with his secretary, Barbé Marbois, and two clerks. They exchanged courtesy visits and the Chevalier invited John and John Quincy to dine with him in his chamber. "You have been waiting a long time, Monsieur Adams," Luzerne said. "Yes," Adams replied, "long enough to have made a sentimental journey through the kingdom." The reply delighted Marbois's English clerk, who caught the allusion to Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*. "Sterne," John added, "is the sweetest, kindest, tenderest, creature in the world . . . there is a rich stream of benevolence, flowing like milk and honey, through all his works."

As they talked of politics and literature Adams observed his prospective shipmates closely. The French ambassador was a large, powerfully built man who looked at John with a strangely somnolent air, closing his eyes for moments at a time as though he were napping and then opening them abruptly to give Adams a curious sidelong glance. Marbois was tall and thin with an open, cheerful face, full of Gallic expressiveness. Both men, Adams noted, were excellent conversationalists. They would be valuable allies in dispelling the boredom of the long ocean crossing.

After dinner John set out with John Quincy for a final walk through L'Orient and the *bois* along the rim of the harbor. With the arrival of the Chevalier the *Sensible* was ready to sail on the first favorable wind and John might not have another chance to indulge his taste for things French. Taking this final, in a sense ritualistic stroll, he saw everything more vividly and poignantly than ever before, "the beggars, servants, *garçons, filles, decrotteurs, blanchisseuses;* barges, *bateaux,* bargemen. Coffeehouses, taverns. Servants at the gates of woods and walks. Fruit. Cakes. Ice creams. *Spectacles.* Tailors for setting a stitch in clothes. Waiters for running with errands, cards, etc., cabin boys. Coach hire. Walking canes. Pamphlets. *Ordonnances.* Carts"—all the delightful, teeming disorder and color of French life which he had come to love. And always the flow of sympathy, of warmth and laughter, of "amiability," as Adams put it; he opened to it all, an inebriate of its richness, intoxicated by the multiformity of this ancient, alien culture which once, for him, had represented wickedness and sin, superstition and idolatry, and which, now ready to leave forever, he could not get enough of.[8]

The next day Luzerne was established on the *Sensible* in the cabin opposite Adams'. John Quincy and Barbé Marbois slung their hammocks in a large room at the ship's stern above the "grand cabin" where the passengers and the ship's officers ate. On the eighteenth of June, after another maddening wait for favorable winds, the *Sensible* sailed out of L'Orient Harbor onto the uncertain waters of the Atlantic. The voyage was a delight to Adams. Luzerne and Marbois, as he had anticipated, proved entertaining companions. He conversed with Luzerne for hours on war, philosophy and politics and was surprised at the Chevalier's knowledge of American characters and American events. The ambassador asked numerous questions about the various Revolutionary leaders, among them Gouverneur Morris and Henry Laurens. Morris, Adams reported, was not a governor, as his name suggested, but a young man who had been chosen to Congress in Adams' absence. He had heard that he was an able man, a man of wit and a composer of "pretty verses," but he had a reputation for illicit love affairs that did him no credit. "The cause of America," John said a little primly, "has not been sustained by such characters." Laurens, on the other hand, had been one of the early leaders of the Revolution, "a man with a great landed fortune . . . long experience in public life, and an amiable character for honor and probity."

Marbois often joined the conversations and Adams found the young secretary somewhat more to his liking than Luzerne, whose aristocratic airs rather put him off. Marbois was seasick soon after *La Sensible* had cleared the harbor and Adams prescribed a "dish of tea" to settle his stomach and told the Frenchman that in America he must learn to drink the brew "in order to please the ladies, who all drank tea" and shone at the tea table. Marbois, indeed, had heard the American ladies praised as being good conversationalists. "Yes," Adams replied, "but they cannot dance, nor sing, nor play music, nor dress so well as the European ladies." Then, feeling a little disloyal, he added that they had wit, sense and virtue, which after all were more important than social graces.

Their conversation ranged over the whole field of French life and literature. Adams had particularly liked Monsieur Turgot, he told Marbois. Turgot, Marbois agreed, was a very good man, "but a little too systematical and a little too enthusiastical."

"Enthusiasm is sometimes a very good quality," the American revolutionist replied, "at least very useful."

"Not for a minister."

"Yes, for a minister in some cases and circumstances."

"Ay, at some times, when he can communicate his enthusiasm to all about him. But at others, when his enthusiasm will be opposed by millions of people of great weight, it will not do."

Adams found the discussion most stimulating. "This Marbois," he wrote later in his cabin, "is one of the best informed and most reflecting men I have known in France. I warrant I shall have much pleasure in his conversation." He and Marbois talked several days afterward of the benefits of the Franco-American alliance and of their hopes that it would be permanent. There were two conditions which might imperil it, Adams argued. Another King, less friendly to the United States, might in time mount the throne of France, or he might have a mistress or a minister who would mislead him. Beyond that, the alliance would be imperiled, he warned Marbois, by any French ambassador or consul who might mix in American internal affairs and attach himself to a particular party or faction.

The warning was clear enough and Marbois took the occasion to assure Adams that "it was the King's determination and the Chevalier's not to throw the weight of the French court into the scale of any individual or party." If it had been done before, it would not be done again. They must take advantage of the crossing, Marbois said, to discuss many matters of mutual interest. "With all my heart," Adams answered, "for I have no secrets." They would speak with entire candor and to make a start—when Adams brought up the matter of Franklin's mastery of the French tongue—Marbois confessed that both Franklin and Adams spoke French atrociously.

John Quincy became the special favorite of Luzerne and Marbois. "The Chevalier de la Luzerne and Monsieur Marbois are in raptures with my son," John noted proudly. They were charmed by the bright, handsome boy who was so precocious and so quiet and reserved. Although he was a cheerful child who laughed readily, there was an appealing quality in the intense seriousness with which he discussed adult subjects. Adams came upon the three of them in his stateroom, the ambassador seated on a cushion, Marbois stretched out on a cot with John Quincy beside him. The boy was giving the two diplomats an English lesson. While the ambassador read aloud in Blackstone's *Discourse,* John Quincy "corrected the pronunciation of every word and syllable and letter." "Why your son is a master of his own language, like a professor," Luzerne said. "He teaches us more than you do. He shows us no mercy and makes us no compliments. We must have Mr. John!"

Marbois endeared himself further to Adams by saying that while Franklin had many friends among the literary lights of France, had made a deep impression and possessed *beaucoup d'agrément* (much charm), he also had *beaucoup de charlatanerie.* Marbois admitted that, while the man had great wit, he lacked the true qualities of statesmanship. He himself had heard many "of the honest people in France" lament the fact that Adams had left the country and hope for his eventual return to Paris or to some other European court. Marbois was a shrewd, professional diplomat far more skilled in "art and design" than Adams. With all his affability and his professions of admiration for the New Englander, he was assiduous in playing upon John's quite evident vanity and self-esteem.

They moved on from politics to religion. Ambassadors had a right to a chapel of their own faith, Marbois pointed out, but Franklin had had no chapel. "No," Adams said laughingly, "because Mr. Franklin had no . . ." He was about to say religion but checked himself, and Marbois interposed, "Mr. Franklin adores only great nature." The religion of nature was the vogue among French intellectuals and Franklin's identification with this fashionable mode of thought was an important element in his popularity. Adams replied: "Yes, all the atheists, Deists and libertines as well as the philosophers and ladies are in his train—and Voltaire, and thence——"

Marbois nodded; Franklin was the great philosopher and legislator of America. Here Adams differed. A philosopher, yes; a legislator, no. "It is universally believed in France, England and all Europe that his electric wand has accomplished this Revolution. But nothing is more groundless. He has done very little. It is believed that he made all the American constitutions and their confederation; but he made neither. He did not even make the constitution of Pennsylvania, bad as it is."

"Who," Marbois inquired, "made the Declaration of Independence?"

"Mr. Jefferson of Virginia was the draftsman," Adams answered. "The committee consisted of Mr. Jefferson, Mr. Harrison, Mr. Rutledge and myself; and we appointed Jefferson a subcommittee to draw it up." As for Franklin, it was certainly true that he was a genius in science. His discoveries in electricity were "very great," and he had written "many things which had great merit, and infinite wit and ingenuity. His *Bonhomme*

Richard was a very ingenious thing which had been so much celebrated in France, gone through . . . many editions, and been recommended by curates and bishops to so many parishes and dioceses." Adams was well aware that Marbois and Luzerne, who had joined the conversation, were leading him on to talk about his rival; but Adams could not forbear to speak out and he justified himself by the assurance that it would have been folly to conceal his "opinion of [Franklin's] great faults," as well as his respect for his great merits.

A few days out at sea, Luzerne took Adams by the arm and told him that Spain was about to declare itself at war with England and in alliance with France. She would not recognize American independence but would do all that she could to support it indirectly. Adams was startled and disappointed. He was upset that the Spanish entry into the war had been surrounded by such a veil of secrecy. It suggested that the French court did not trust its American ally or its representatives in France. Yet Adams was guarded in his response and tried not to show his chagrin to Luzerne.

The discipline on the ship, of course, was a matter of intense interest to Adams. He saw during the whole voyage "no punishments inflicted, no blows struck, nor heard scarcely an angry word spoken from the Captain to any of his officers, or from any of the officers to the men. They live together," he noted with astonishment, "in greater intimacy and familiarity than any family I ever saw." The quarterdeck was as open to the men as to the officers. The Captain, the officers, the ambassador himself strolled or sat about the deck "upon a footing of perfect equality that is not seen in one of our country town meetings in America. I never saw so much equality and leveling in any society whatever," he added. Such mingling would never be seen on a British or even on an American frigate. What Adams observed was in part the informality that is sometimes a consequence of rigidly drawn class lines, freely acknowledged and accepted by all parties. Beyond that he was privy to the unique capacity of Frenchmen to live together *en famille* whatever the particular circumstances. It was an aspect of that amiable and civilized temper which so appealed to the New Englander.

On the fourth of July, Adams received the compliments of Luzerne, Marbois, Chavagnes, the Captain of *La Sensible* and the secretaries of the Chevalier; even a special feast was spread in honor of American independence.

Finally, after a voyage of somewhat more than five weeks, *La Sensible* entered American waters, concealed from cruising English frigates by a thick fog. The ship made port at Boston on the second of August and Adams and the French diplomats parted with sincere expressions of friendship. Their acquaintance had been mutually beneficial; Luzerne and Marbois had probably learned more of American politics and American character than Adams intended to teach them; Adams in turn had acquired from the urbane Frenchmen greater insight into the nature of their profession or art.[9]

XXXI

THE REUNION at Braintree saw much rejoicing. John's journeys and returns gave his lifelong romance with Abigail a dramatic intensity; when they came together after their long partings it was with the tenderness and excitement of young lovers—an ecstasy of delight in each other, a sense of rediscovery that almost reconciled them to their painful separations. They had been separated for eighteen long, long months; in consequence their delight in their reunion was infinitely greater.

There was the usual round of visits to family and friends in which the widely traveled John Quincy was the special object of attention and had to repeat a dozen times his recitation of the palaces and cathedrals he had looked at, the famous places he had visited, the famous men he had met; had to speak in French and show off his French suit and answer dozens of questions from fourteen-year-old Nabby about the styles and dresses of great French ladies.

Adams' first task was to inform Congress of his return, explain the reason for his delay and request that his accounts might be settled. He followed this letter with a review of the state of affairs in Europe. After a brief discussion of the principles of the European balance of power, Adams assured Congress that it might have every confidence in the zeal and attachment of the French nation. "The French court," Adams wrote, "never made war with so universal a popularity among their own subjects, so general an approbation of other courts, and such unanimous wishes among all nations for her success as at this time." The rise of France had been accompanied by the decline of England, a nation which hastened to its ruin. "Her riches," John declared, "in which her power consisted, she had lost with us, and never can regain. With us she has lost her Mediterranean trade, her African trade, her German and Holland trade, her ally Portugal, her ally Russia, and her natural ally the house of Austria. . . . She resembles the melancholy spectacle of a great wide-spreading tree that has been girdled at the root. . . . I think," he added, "that every citizen in the present circumstances, who respects his country and the engagements she has taken, ought to abstain from the foresight of a return of friendship between us and the English, and act as if it never was to be."

Holland was the country in all Europe whose friendship would be most helpful to the United States. The Dutch had a "similitude of manners, of religion and in some respects of constitution; the analogy between the means by which the two republics arrived at independency; but above all the attractions of commercial interest will infallibly draw them together." For the moment pressures from Great Britain would prevent an open alliance, but loans of money and some private commercial connections might be obtained. "It seems that the trade between the countries is likely to increase, and possibly Congress may think it expedient to send a minister there." If Congress should take such actions its representative ought to be given discretionary power to produce his commission or not as the circumstances seemed to warrant, and beyond that be authorized to borrow what money he could. "The man himself, above all, should have a consummate prudence and a caution and discretion that will be proof against every trial."

Who might this be (although of course he did not say it) but Adams himself? He had been mentioned as a possible minister to Holland. His reference to the post suggested very strongly that, having experienced the ardors and the pleasures of the diplomatic life, he was not averse to serving again. His detailed discussion of the problems and prospects involved in an alliance with Holland might suggest to members of Congress who read the letter that here was an ideal candidate for the job.[1]

In exploring the reasons for his own recall, he was disturbed to discover that Lovell and Samuel Adams had voted to include his name among those commissioners and agents of Congress who were censured for squabbling and partisanship. Indeed, once home he grew if anything more sensitive to Congress' treatment of him. The censure itself, together with what he referred to as being superseded by Franklin (though he had himself recommended that action), and the failure to appoint him to another mission or to give any expression of appreciation for the performance of his duties, were like grains of sand under his sensitive skin. "I have little to say," he wrote Benjamin Rush, "about the time and manner of my being superseded. Let those reflect upon themselves who are disgraced by it, not I. Those who did it are alone disgraced by it."[2]

Jealous of his reputation, he badgered his friends in Congress for some account of the charges which had been brought against him as a commissioner. He wrote to Gerry, McKean, Whipple and Lovell, vindicating his own actions in France and asking them for the secret as well as the public Journals of Congress so that he might trace the effects of the dispute there between the Lee-Deane factions. He also poured forth a considerable amount of advice, much of it good, on the conduct of foreign affairs. Arthur Lee, he suggested, might be sent to Spain to negotiate a treaty with that country. Certainly he should be gotten out of France, if possible, without any further injury to his tender feelings. Adams respected Lee's services and his patriotism but he also knew "his prejudices and his passions. His countenance," he added, "is disquieting, his air not pleasing, his manners not engaging, his temper . . . harsh, sour and fiery, and his judgment of men and things is often wrong. . . . Izard is still worse. . . . I believe such a group of characters as Lee, Izard and Deane never were before selected for ambassadors." Although Lee would be less of a problem in Spain than in France, Adams could not help but "dread the consequence" of his going to that country. "He will be watched," he wrote. "He will be provoked and he cannot govern himself."[3]

Adams had hardly gotten settled at Braintree when a town meeting was held to elect a delegate to the state constitutional convention which had been set for September. Ever since the spring of 1776, and indeed before, Massachusetts had been fussing with a frame of government. Prior to independence, the state functioned under an extralegal form of the royal charter government. For some months after independence it seemed easier to continue to make out one way or another with a modified form of the charter government than to write a new constitution which would be satisfactory to the citizens of Massachusetts. So the government continued to operate with its head cut off (in the character of the deposed Governor), and with its judicial limbs badly mutilated (since commissions still were issued in the King's name, there was serious doubt as to the validity of most legal proceedings). In March 1778 a frame of government drafted by the General Court was submitted to the people of the state for approval. Its appearance was greeted with general apathy. A two-thirds majority was required for ratification and the constitution fell far short of such numbers. Only some twelve thousand voters bothered to go to the polls (a hundred and twenty towns failed to express any opinion at all), and five sixths of those who voted opposed the new government.

The constitution undoubtedly had serious weaknesses but Adams regretted its defeat, since he felt that its weaknesses could be amended and that in any event it was much better than no constitution at all. Most disturbing was the growing popular sentiment that no other government was necessary than that truncated instrument under which the state was presently conducting its public affairs. This was part of that general spirit, of which we have spoken earlier, which held that men were naturally good and wise or at least perfectible—and were debased by social and political forms. Government, as Tom Paine had put it, was the badge of lost innocence. The best state would be the one least governed; one where the formal agencies through which men had conducted their common affairs since the beginning of recorded history had withered away and man was free to be his noble, uncorrupted self, equal, classless and ideally happy.

The more conservative, historically oriented leaders in the state were alarmed at the spread of such attitudes. It seemed clear to them that one of the incontestable lessons of history was that without strong and efficient government and just laws chaos and anarchy were inevitable. So they set doggedly to work to counteract the popular currents and to procure an adequate government for their state. The General Court, disheartened by the rejection of its handiwork, was nonetheless prevailed on to submit to the people of the state the question of whether they wanted any new government; secondly (if this answer was in the affirmative), whether they wished to call a constitutional convention for the express purpose of framing one. Again there was general apathy but in the towns that voted—somewhat less than two thirds of the towns of the state—a majority of the voters supported both propositions.

It was to this constitutional convention that Adams was elected as the representative of Braintree a week after his return to his own hearth. There were three weeks before the convention met at Cambridge. Adams spent the time working about the farm, doing a little law business and pondering the great problems of constitutional government. "I am about to assist in the formation of a new constitution," he wrote Elbridge Gerry, "a subject which has been out of my head so long that I have forgotten most of the reflections I ever had about it. Can't you give us a few hints?"[4]

Adams reviewed his *Thoughts on Government*, reread Harrington and Hoadley, the Virginia constitution and bill of rights, and the constitutions already framed by other states. By the time the delegates convened at Cambridge he had refreshed his thoughts and "ripened" his councils. On the third of September the convention by a vote of 250 to 1 resolved to prepare a declaration of rights, then went a step further and determined that it would, following its mandate, frame a new government which should be in form "a FREE REPUBLIC!" The next day a committee of thirty, including John and Samuel Adams, the latter on leave from Congress, James Bowdoin and John Lowell, was appointed to draft the new constitution.

A day was spent in "free conversation" on the general principles of government; Adams took the occasion to argue that it was impossible for human wisdom to form a plan of government that would provide for all future contingencies. The government they were meeting to frame should therefore make provisions for periodical revision. Having discussed the general principles of the projected constitution, the convention voted to adjourn until the twenty-eighth of October to give the committee time to do its work. The committee met promptly in Boston and appointed three of its members—the two Adamses and Bowdoin (all of Suffolk County)—to write a draft of the new government, and the subcommittee in turn designated John to undertake the task.

In the midst of his labors over the constitution Adams received a letter from his old companion and ally, Richard Henry Lee, who confessed himself much interested in the establishment of a "wise and free republic in Massachusetts Bay, where I hope," he wrote, "to finish the remainder of my days. The hasty, unpersevering, aristocratic genius of the South," he added, "suits not my disposition and is inconsistent with my ideas of what must constitute social happiness and security." Lee professed himself dismayed at Adams' declared intention to retire from public service. He was, the Virginian insisted, more needed than ever. Gérard, he implied, had done much to keep the congressional kettle at a boil and to produce "such scenes of wicked intrigue . . . as I have never expected would take place in America until maturity of times and luxury with its concomitant train of vices had ripened us for destruction."[5]

When Adams presented his draft several weeks later the sub-subcommittee and the committee of thirty made certain alterations before passing it on to the convention. But even with minor changes and deletions and one major change in the article dealing with religious freedom, the constitution was Adams' handiwork. The preamble was a typically eighteenth-century statement deriving from Locke, fortified by a dozen other writers on law and government. "The end of the institution, maintenance and administration of government," Adams had written, "is to secure the existence of the body politic; to protect it, and to furnish the individuals who compose it with the power of enjoying, in safety and tranquillity, their natural rights and the blessings of life; and whenever these great objects are not obtained, the people have a right to alter the government and to take measures necessary for their safety, happiness and prosperity."

Here Adams restated the classic justification for revolution. He then proceeded to express gratitude for the goodness "of the great Legislator of the universe" in giving the convention an opportunity "of entering into an original, explicit and solemn compact with each other, deliberately and peaceably, without fraud, violence or surprise." It was the latter which was so unique in this great age of American constitution-making. Other constitutions had been imposed by wise kings, benevolent assemblies of aristocrats, feudal lords, impatient despots or, more frequently, had taken form through the slow accumulation of customary laws, growing over generations and centuries by a process of accretion and refinement, like the British constitution. But united American states were the first states in history to approach the problem of constitution-making in a truly enlightened and scientific spirit, to draw upon both the practical experience of nations as recorded, for example, in Tacitus or Thucydides, and the theories of Plato or Harrington or Locke.

Soon constitution-making would become almost as common as drawing legal briefs. Everybody would seem to be taking a hand in it; but for the moment America was the stage or the laboratory on which were fixed the eyes of all men anywhere in the world who were concerned with building a better new world out of the lumber of the old. Some men, wedded to the existing order, looked with fear and hostility on the developments in America; many more watched expectantly.

For the declaration of rights which preceded the constitution itself Adams leaned heavily on George Mason's classic statement in the Virginia bill of rights, written three years earlier. It is interesting to note that where, in the first article, Adams had written: "All men are born equally free and independent . . ." the convention deleted "equally" and replaced "independent" with "equal." Thus Adams' effort to do away with what was to him the disturbingly ambiguous phrase "born free and equal" came to nothing. It seemed so clear to him that men were most emphatically not born equal, either in wealth or talents, which made the phrase misleading and consequently dangerous. "Free and independent," yes; "free and equal," no.

The opening clause of the constitution declared firmly: "In the government of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts the legislative, executive and judicial power shall be placed in separate departments, to the end that it might be a government of laws, and not of men."

Adams' draft provided for a two-house legislature, a strong executive and an independent judiciary. The upper house, the senators, were to be elected for one year on a vote by every male over the age of twenty-one who had a freehold estate with a yearly income of three pounds a year, "or real or personal estate of the value of sixty pounds." The property qualification was in fact a mild one that would be satisfied by the great majority of males over the age of twenty-one. Even if a man did not own real property, but was a tenant, the chances were he could with his clothes, furnishings, tools of his trade and personal savings satisfy the requirement (seldom if ever strictly enforced) of sixty pounds' worth of property. If he was a poor but respectable citizen of his community he was not apt to be challenged at the polls. Yet the provision was objectionable to the more liberal members of the convention and some of the towns protested.

No one could run for senator who did not have a freehold estate in the Commonwealth of a value of at least three hundred pounds. There were two bases for this requirement. One, that it would limit the senators to the more substantial citizens of the state; and second, that since the Senate, or upper house, was designed especially to represent the propertied interests, the senators should be prosperous property-holders themselves. This requirement, like the property qualification for voting, offended the sensibilities of contemporary and more especially of later critics of the Massachusetts constitution of 1780, who maintained that it was an undemocratic limitation. In fact the property limitations only ratified what was then and later a fact of American political life—that successful candidates for elective office on the state and national level were, overwhelmingly, individuals of substantial property. Even the most outspoken champions of the people were generally men in comfortable financial circumstances. The Senate had the right to control its own adjournments, if they were not of more than two days in length, to try all impeachments, and to judge the qualifications of its own members.

The lower house, the House of Representatives, was to be made up of members elected from every incorporated town containing more than one hundred and fifty electors. A town with more than three hundred and fifty voters was entitled to two representatives; one with six hundred, three; and another for every two hundred and fifty more. The representatives, like the senators, served one-year terms. To be eligible to be a representative a man must have real property valued at one hundred pounds.

The House of Representatives was given the right to make impeachments and the Senate to try them. Like the Senate, the House had control over its own proceedings; it had the power to originate all money bills, but the Senate had the right to "propose or concur with amendments, as on other bills."

The Governor, likewise chosen annually, must be of the Christian religion and possessed of a freehold of the value of one thousand pounds. He was commander-in-chief of the military and naval forces of the state, but could serve only five out of seven years. In contrast with many of the state governors, the Massachusetts executive possessed real powers; in order for the three branches—legislative, executive and judicial—to balance properly, each must be strong and independent. To insure the independence of the executive, Adams gave him an absolute veto over the acts of the legislature.

When Elbridge Gerry heard the provision for an executive veto he entered a sharp dissent. He was not even reconciled, he wrote, to a two-house legislature. "In such a state as this," Adams replied, "I am persuaded we never shall have any stability, dignity or liberty without it. We have so many men of wealth, of ambitious spirits, or intrigue, of luxury and corruption that incessant factions will disturb our peace without it, and indeed there is too much reason to fear with it. The executive . . . ought to be the reservoir of wisdom as the legislature is of liberty. Without this weapon of defense [the veto power] he will be run down like a hare before the hounds."[6]

The judiciary was likewise independent, the judges being appointed during good behavior and thus presumably free from political pressure.

Chapter V of the constitution dealt with Harvard. The first article spoke of "our wise and pious ancestors" who had established the college, "in which . . . university many persons of great eminence have by the blessing of God been initiated into those arts and sciences which qualified for public employments, both in church and state." Since "the encouragement of arts and sciences and all good literature," Adams wrote, "tends to the honor of God, and the advantage of the Christian religion, and the great benefit of this and the other United States of America" it followed that the university should be confirmed in all the "powers, authorities, rights, liberties, privileges, immunities and franchises" which it presently enjoyed.

Section II of Chapter V was headed "The Encouragement of Literature, etc." As we have seen, it was Adams' conviction that education along with morality was essential in a republic. The state therefore had an obligation to provide for the education of its citizens. As Adams put it: "Wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties, and as these depend on spreading the opportunities and advantages of education in the various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people, it shall be the duty of legislators and magistrates, in all future periods of this Commonwealth, to cherish the interests of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries of them."

The university, the public schools and the grammar schools should be the special concern of the legislators, but beyond that they should do everything to encourage "private societies and public institutions"; they should grant special rewards and concessions to stimulate the study of agriculture, commerce, trades, manufactures, the arts and "a natural history of the country." Beyond that the legislature should take an active role in what might be called the moral and spiritual spheres of the community by seeking to "inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence, public and private charity, industry and frugality, honesty and punctuality in their dealings, sincerity, good humor, and all social affections and generous sentiments among the people."

Adams trembled for the fate of his innovation. The delegates, practical men for the most part, would doubtless strike out the section or at the very least cavil over the idea of sponsoring a "natural history" or trying to spread "good humor" among the citizens of Massachusetts. The "good humor" Adams had in mind was the "good humor" of the French—the amiable, easygoing delight in life that had so charmed him. He must have known in his heart that it would take more than legislative sanction to turn New Englanders into Frenchmen, even in so small (or perhaps so large) a particular. But the convention, with Adams absent, received the whole section "very kindly" and, suppressing whatever astonishment it may have felt, passed it unanimously without amendment.

The Massachusetts constitution of 1780, although belated, was a classic document of the conservative stamp and an early prototype of the federal constitution, framed seven years later. In it Adams worked out specifically his earlier thoughts on government, especially the idea of the separation of the different branches of the government and their careful balancing, so that each would be a check on the other, and no one branch would dominate the whole. It was Adams' principal claim to fame as a constitution-maker and his last act in American domestic politics until he returned from Europe almost ten years later.

While Adams was still at work on his draft of the Massachusetts frame of government, Congress had taken up once more the question of a diplomatic mission for him. Under proddings by Gérard, Luzerne's predecessor as minister plenipotentiary to the United States, Congress reaffirmed its determination that "no offer of advantage, however great and alluring, no extremes of danger, however alarming, shall induce us to violate the faith we have given and the resolutions we have adopted"—not to negotiate a separate treaty of peace with Great Britain. The delegates then proceeded to discuss the conditions of such a treaty, and to decide on the treaty commissioners.

Franklin was promptly nominated "out of order" as minister to negotiate with Great Britain. The partisans of Arthur Lee thereupon determined to nominate the Virginian as joint commissioner with Franklin. The anti-Lee delegates, to block this move, agreed to vote for a single minister to conduct the treaty negotiations in behalf of Congress. Henry Laurens put up Adams and James Smith of New York nominated John Jay. The first ballot showed five states for Adams and four for Jay; the second, six for Adams and five for Jay. A majority of seven was required for election and when it became apparent that Adams could not muster a majority Jay's supporters, hoping to elect Adams as minister to Spain and thus clear the way for their candidate, moved that a minister plenipotentiary to negotiate a treaty with Spain be elected first. Lee was nominated by Laurens, Adams by William Paca and Jay by Mercer of Virginia. Before the balloting James Lovell produced two letters from Adams which appeared to clear Lee of the imputation that Vergennes distrusted him. Lee, nonetheless, was passed over for the post that Adams considered him ill fitted for, and Jay instead was sentenced to what turned out to be a most frustrating mission. On the balloting which followed for a minister plenipotentiary to negotiate a treaty of peace and a treaty of commerce with Great Britain, Adams was the only nominee for the post and was elected by eleven states, Pennsylvania voting loyally for Franklin, although he was not officially in nomination. These various maneuverings, which had the effect, ultimately, of doing in Arthur Lee, prompted Lovell to write to Adams, "What damned dirty work is this of politics!"

Gérard, as soon as he heard of the results, wrote to Vergennes that the choice of Jay as minister to Spain "leaves nothing to desire. To much intelligence and the best intentions he joins a conciliating spirit." About Adams he was more reserved. "He is known," he noted, "to but a few of the present members of Congress. He has the reputation of an honest man, and the presumption that he would be agreeable to you has influenced their opinion."[7]

Elbridge Gerry wrote at once to inform Adams of his appointment. "The embarrassments, difficulties and delays attending this business," he observed, "in consequence of the disputes between the late commissioners, have exceeded everything of the kind which I have before met with. . . . I flatter myself," he added, "that you will not hesitate a moment at accepting the highest office of honor and trust under the United States, when elected thereto by the voice of eleven states. Indeed it may be called unanimous, as there was only a single vote for Dr. Franklin."

Adams had asked for a copy of the charges against him as commissioner to France but Congress felt, Gerry wrote, that its appointment of him as minister plenipotentiary to negotiate the peace treaty was in effect a rejection of the charge. To send a copy to Adams would be to give it more weight than it merited, would reflect on Congress for having appointed him minister, and obligate that body to give him a hearing and thereby reopen the whole sore issue. It seemed thus much better to drop the matter since the censure had been dictated only by expediency. "Upon the whole," Gerry wrote, "I am of opinion that in the esteem of Congress your character is as high as any gentleman's in America." If Adams had pressed the matter further "we should have been more deeply involved in animosities and dissension and have put a total stop to our foreign negotiations." Gerry, like a number of other delegates, had voted to recall Lee, not because he believed him anything but a faithful servant of his country, but because he felt that the storm that had blown up about him had destroyed his usefulness.[8]

Among those who wrote Adams urging him to accept the appointment was James Lovell. The position was a critical one and if Adams declined it (and many in Congress hoped he would), "no other New England man will be chosen," and "the interest of America requires, blind as some people are to it, that a New England man should negotiate a peace."[9]

Gerry's and Lovell's letters appeased Adams. He held no grudge against Izard for his criticism of him, which was evidently not intended in any sense as a formal charge. "And as I have in general so good an opinion of Mr. Izard's attachment to his country and of his honor, I shall not think myself bound to take any further notice of this fruit of his inexperience in public life, this peevish ebullition of the rashness of his temper." He would take it "to be a specimen of Iz's wit and humor, a kind of funny exultation to his friend, in confidence, for having judged so much better of the interest of his country than I did."[10]

With the acceptance of his appointment as minister plenipotentiary to negotiate treaties of peace and of commerce with Great Britain, Adams embarked on what was perhaps the most arduous and frustrating service of his career. Gérard, the agent of Vergennes, on his master's instructions, had done his best to prevail on Congress to send Franklin full powers to negotiate in the peace conference which it was hoped would follow upon Spain's offer to mediate, and to arrange for a long-term truce, if necessary. Gérard, further, did his best to persuade Congress to accept Spain's claims to the exclusive control of the Mississippi, to abandon an uncompromising position on the fisheries, and to put their ministers or commissioners to France under French guidance and control. This policy was not successful but it had brought on an extended debate and served to deepen existing divisions. In general the supporters of Deane and Franklin and the enemies of the Lees favored acquiesence to French requests, while their opponents feared the influence of the French court in American affairs and wished the United States to pursue as far as possible an independent line.

The attitude of the King and Vergennes was perfectly understandable. One of the great nations of the world was befriending, for its own interests, a handful of colonials only a few generations removed from a simple frontier existence. If France showed an almost ruthless determination to try to exploit nearby Holland for its own advantage in its struggle with Great Britain, it was hardly to be expected that she should show notable restraint in her relations with the United States. It was not unnatural that the King and his ministers should expect, in return for their aid, a humble submissiveness and an almost filial gratitude. Certainly without vast amounts of French help the American cause would be in a bad way.

Adams and Americans of similar persuasion took the view that France and the United States were allies and equals in theory if not in fact. They appreciated the assistance, the friendliness and the good will that the French people and the court manifested toward the Continental struggle for independence, a spirit of interest and support that quite clearly went beyond the strict requirements of self-interest. They returned such feelings, as we have plainly seen in Adams' case, with a warmth and enthusiasm of their own. But Adams kept his eyes clearly fixed on what seemed to him to be the interests of his country. He felt that it was his responsibility to protect those interests at all cost; that friendship, good will, concord, the most tender and sentimental feelings of rapport—all were ultimately irrelevant when placed against the proper interests of the United States. As the representative of a nation which, however small, was engaged in the most glorious and remarkable revolution in all history, he had no inclination to yield on a single point that he considered vital to his country. Novice diplomat as he was, he had grasped instinctively and held fast to the basic principle of diplomacy—the legitimate interests of one's own country are paramount; history accepts no excuses for the negotiator who bargains them away.

John carefully avoided the extreme position of Izard, who, he declared, held the opinion "that it was good policy and necessary to hold a high language" to the French court; "to represent to them the danger of our being subdued if they did not do this and the other thing for us, in order to obtain money and other aids from them." For his part Adams was convinced, as he wrote to his cousin, that it would not be "truth or . . . good policy to assume the style of menace, and threaten them with returning again to Great Britain and joining against France and Spain," or indeed even to tell them that without their aid America would be subdued, "because I never believed this myself, and the court . . . would not have believed it from us." Adams fully appreciated the fact that the French ministers had "many difficulties to manage as well as we"; it was "delicate and hazardous to push things" too hard.

Vergennes, for his part, had never responded to the New Englander. Adams seemed to him a stiff, awkward, tenacious little man, without grace or charm but with an extraordinary amount of presumption, who seemed to think it his place to advise Vergennes on how to run the war. Moreover, before Adams' return, Vergennes received word from Luzerne that Adams was closely identified with Samuel Adams and Richard Henry Lee and, like them, wished to undertake a separate negotiation with England, to abandon the French alliance at the first opportunity, and as an independent nation once more form close ties with Great Britain. We know from Adams' correspondence that he not only had no such idea—it would have been inconsistent with his sense of honor—but rather felt that England would remain the implacable enemy of the United States long after a treaty of peace was concluded and that France was America's natural ally. But Vergennes was misinformed. To his personal dislike for Adams he added a deep suspicion of his motives. The combination would cast a long shadow over the next phase of Adams' diplomatic career.

Adams was happily unaware of all this when he wrote to accept the appointment of Congress; nonetheless it was evident that the manner in which he had been relieved of his position as a commissioner still rankled, and he was irritated at having Jay, as it were, outrank him. He could, he reminded Gerry, have gone to Europe with the original commission if he had not refused to expose himself "to the sea and the enemy." He could have been nominated in place of Izard or William Lee. "I suspect," he wrote, "that I shall go to France and live there without much negotiation with England for some time. . . . My request is that in case there should be no business to do as a negotiator with England, and in case you should send to Holland or Prussia, that you will employ me to one of those places." These were his first preferences, yet he would go to France or Spain if Congress so desired.

There had been, he added, "a kind of fatality" in the councils of his home state. Her delegates had never stood by one another like those from other states. There was, indeed, "a jealousy if not an envy" against Massachusetts and the divisions among her representatives allowed the other states to take advantage of her. For example, Silas Deane was "but of yesterday and of nothing" in the Revolutionary cause compared with Adams. He had been "known in Europe and vastly celebrated as a writer in this controversy vs. G.B. more than fourteen years ago" while Deane was virtually unknown. Arthur Lee had likewise been given precedence over him. Yet his experience and his claims were far greater than either Lee's or Deane's. "Is it possible, sir," he asked, "that the Massachusetts Bay should ever be respected or her rights respected if the men she most respects are thus to be slighted?" Jay had been made minister plenipotentiary and he, Adams, a commissioner. "This," he wrote, "no doubt is done to give Mr. Jay rank of me and a title above me, in order to maintain the superiority of New York above [a] Massachusetts man. Mr. Jay's name was never heard till 1774, mine was well known in politics in 1764. . . . It is really important that the delegates of Massachusetts Bay should support each other['s] honor and characters, which never can be done if such little stigmas are suffered to be fixed upon them so unjustly."[11]

XXXII

Once Adams had decided to accept the appointment there were family conclaves and conferences. It was cruel to be snatched away so quickly after the long agony of separation. Again they debated whether Abigail should accompany him. There was her health to consider, not just for her own sake, in which case the decision would have been easy enough, but for the children's. Nabby, in her early teens, was just at the age when she most needed her mother's attention and supervision. Paris would be a most demoralizing place for a young girl. Tommy, just seven, was too young to be taken and too young to be boarded out. Then there was the matter of expense; Congress had made no provision for the transportation and accommodation of a family. Finally, the mission should not be unduly prolonged. England was everywhere on the defensive, its Exchequer strained to the utmost, its people restless and dissatisfied. Six months or a year should see the successful conclusion of a treaty of peace and a commercial treaty should soon follow.

After all facets of the subject had been discussed exhaustively it seemed most practical to leave Abigail home once more. Although John at first did not intend to take John Quincy, the boy's European experience had been so successful that it was finally decided to take him and to add Charles, three years younger and almost as promising as his older brother. Charles, if he lacked Johnny's remarkable precociousness, made up for it by his charm. He was the handsomest of four handsome children, a boy full of a natural grace of spirit which endeared everyone to him and made him the pet of the family. Quick and bright, he had a gaiety and ebullience that contrasted sharply with the reserve of his parents and, indeed, of his brothers and his sister Nabby. In addition John decided to take John Thaxter as his personal secretary and Joseph Stevens as his servant.

Marbois and Luzerne wrote to congratulate Adams on his appointment. Marbois urged him to take John Quincy back with him in spite of the boy's aversion to sailing. He would one day be a very useful servant of his country; France and the United States would both profit from his knowledge and sympathy for that country. Luzerne informed him that he had requested Captain Chavagnes of *La Sensible* to remain at Boston to carry him back to France. *La Sensible* could not delay her sailing more than a few weeks, so once more hasty preparations had to be made: food, clothing, an extensive inventory this time for five people instead of two and with everything far dearer and infinitely harder to procure. Abigail's ingenuity and enterprise were put to their severest test and once more she came through with colors flying, though the whole family and connections from Milton and Weymouth south to Plymouth were shaken down to equip the travelers.

The time before sailing went much too rapidly. John and Abigail snatched what few moments they could from the rush of preparation and from John's attendance at the constitutional convention. He left that body with considerable reluctance. Having framed the constitution, it was frustrating not to be present to defend it and to ease its passage through the convention. But that must be left in other hands. He could only hope and pray for the best—that it might pass through relatively unmutilated.

The hour for now familiar but nonetheless acutely painful parting was on them almost before they knew it. With a heavy heart Abigail surrendered her husband and two sons and John Thaxter, who was almost like a son, to the uncertain hazards of a wartime ocean crossing, determined as always to keep herself from any demonstration of grief that might make the departure more trying.

The little party left for Boston the twelfth of November, and the following day John wrote that he had sent the two Johns, Quincy and Thaxter, on board *La Sensible* with the baggage and would follow himself with Charles and Stevens in the afternoon. His friend Francis Dana, to Adams' great satisfaction, had consented to accept the appointment by Congress as secretary of the legation and he would join them in the morning. Abigail's aunt, Mrs. Isaac Smith, had presented him with a barrel of that New England ambrosia, cranberries. "We shall yet be happy, I hope and pray, and I don't doubt it," he added. "I shall have vexations enough, as usual. You will have anxiety and tenderness as usual. Pray strive not to have too much. . . . Yours, ever, ever yours."[1]

When the ship's barge with Adams and young Charles aboard touched the side of *La Sensible*, the crew, mustered on deck by the Captain, mounted the shrouds and huzzaed *"Vivre le roi."* Adams and Charles were given John's old cabin, and Thaxter and John Quincy were assigned "a large cot" in the main cabin.

For Abigail the cottage was emptier than ever. How desolate it looked! "My table I set down to it," she wrote, "but cannot swallow my food." Sensibility was both a badge and burden. It meant an intenser awareness of life and a greater exposure to suffering. Abigail could not forbear to cry out against the terrible wounding of love, the incalculable dimensions of loneliness. Having borne the agony of parting once, she decided to ride up to Boston, hoping for a brief glimpse of the three of them "though my heart would suffer again the cruel torture of separation." But they had gone on board by the time she arrived. She could see the proud ship with its precious cargo, riding at anchor in the harbor. "And does your heart forebode that we shall again be happy?" she wrote after her return to Braintree. "My hopes and fears rise and fall alternately—I cannot resign more than I do, unless life itself was called for. My dear sons, I cannot think of them without a tear. . . . God Almighty bless and protect my dearest friend and in His own time restore him to the affectionate bosom of Portia." A day later the frigate raised anchor, caught a favorable wind and made way. Johnny and Charles, as the ship rode the long swells off Cape Ann, felt the first pangs of seasickness. "I hope," John wrote Abigail, "that this will be the last separation we shall suffer from each other for any length of time."

Off the Grand Banks, clear of the British cruisers, the *Romulus* and the *Virginia, La Sensible* encountered an American privateer out of Boston and John had another opportunity to write Abigail. Charles had made as stout a sailor as his older brother. They had sailed through a bad storm and all been sick. Dana on his first sea passage had been miserable, and even now the ship pitched so that Adams was obliged to crouch on his knees to scrawl his note.[2]

The voyage, which was a swift one, was taken up with reading, with conversation with Dana and Thaxter, and with tutoring Johnny and Charles in French and Latin. Adams took the time to review his instructions from Congress until he knew them almost by heart. The first condition of negotiation was that, prior to any specific proposition, Great Britain must agree to treat with the United States, not as a rebellious subject but as a "sovereign free and independent" state. In other words independence was not to be a subject of negotiation but a precondition of any discussion. Another article of his instructions concerned the boundaries of the United States, rather vaguely stated to be sure. Congress wished to have Britain cede Canada and Nova Scotia to the United States but, perhaps aware of the extravagance of this demand, the instructions added that the cessions and the statement of the equal and common rights of the United States to the Newfoundland fisheries should not be made an absolute ultimatum. Yet the letter of Samuel Huntington, President of Congress, to Adams placed great emphasis on the fisheries and amplified the clause in his instructions which dealt with the issue. Both Franklin and Adams were urged to try to get from Vergennes a specific guarantee of American rights to the fishery. Finally, "in all other matters not above mentioned you are to govern yourself by the alliance between His Most Christian Majesty and these states, by the advice of our allies, by your knowledge of our interests, and by your own discretion."[3]

The crossing ended on an unhappy note. A storm had sprung a leak in the frigate that kept two pumps going day and night and the Captain decided to put into Ferrol, Spain, to repair the leak rather than risk the longer run to L'Orient and the danger of interception by a British warship. The decision was a blow to Adams. He must make his way with his little party by land over the Pyrenees in winter where there were no public conveyances. It would mean purchasing a carriage and horses and making a long dangerous journey through an unfamiliar land.

On Wednesday, December 8, *La Sensible* put into Ferrol, a port swarming with French and Spanish naval officers. Adams and his sons and John Thaxter went ashore and took lodgings at one of the two taverns in the town, an inn run by a native of America who spoke both Spanish and French as well as English. There, although their host was an obliging man, they were kept "constantly unhappy by an uneasy landlady." After getting settled, the little party went off to dine with the Lieutenant Governor of the Marine. John was struck by the contrast between the French and Spanish officers at the table. "Gravity and silence" distinguished the Spaniards; "gaiety and vivacity and loquacity" the French. After dinner the company went to the Italian opera: "many officers, few ladies; music and dancing tolerable; the language, Italian—not understood," Adams noted.

Ferrol itself was a rather drab town; two churches—one, the Church of St. Julien, was very handsome—arsenals, drydocks and fortifications exhausted its notable sights, but it was placed in a magnificent setting of lofty mountains, and the stone with which its houses were built was hardly to be distinguished from the granite of Braintree. Adams found some compensation in discovering that the French consul was an authority on Gallic law and he spent several happy hours discussing with him the survival of feudal residues in modern French jurisprudence, as, for instance, in the ancient provision that a parricide be placed in a hogshead with an adder, a toad, a dog and a cat, and cast alive into the sea. In modern times the parricide was first hanged, then placed in a barrel with the required animals printed on it and buried. So was the law complied with.

Despite the barrenness of Ferrol, Adams was as curious and observant as ever. He noted that there were few horses and those small and shabby. Mules and asses were the principal means of transportation; there was no hay and the animals ate wheat straw. "The bread, the cabbages, cauliflowers, apples, pears, etc., are good," he wrote; "the beef, pork, poultry, etc., are good. The fish are good—excellent eels, sardines and other fish and tolerable oysters, but not like ours." The men and women were handsome—dark-haired, dark-skinned, creatures with "fine black eyes"—and children walked the streets barefoot in the mild December weather. Both sexes wore their long black hair Ramillied down to their waists and even to their knees.

Since it was apparent that they were going to be in Spain for some weeks, Adams bought Sobrino's *Spanish Dictionary* in three handsome quarto volumes. "By the help of these books," he noted, "the children and gentlemen are learning the language very fast. . . . I flatter myself that in a month I should be able to read it very well, and to make myself understood, as well as understand the Spaniards."[4]

Equipping themselves for their journey across the mountains was in itself quite an undertaking. The party of Americans had to carry with them their own beds and bedding and most of their own food—chocolate, tea, sugar, meat, wine, spirits, butter and cheese and even salt and pepper. Adams hired two Spanish carriages, calashes, gaudy with brass nails and bright paint, the leather upholstery old and dry and cracked, the tacking broken and tied with twine, the paint chipped and scratched. In one of these rickety conveyances John rode with the two boys while Francis Dana and Thaxter rode in the other. The driver of Adams' calash, Señor Eusebio Seberino, wore a black silk cap with a little oilcloth cover to protect his head from the rain. His hair hung in a braid down his back; a red and white spotted handkerchief was tied around his neck and a short double-breasted jacket kept out the mountain cold. Mules pulled the calashes, and the three servants rode mules, small, lean animals with the same patient, detached air as the muleteers who drove them, the same suggestion in their dark, inscrutable eyes of an inner mystery bred from suffering and endurance. They were close-cropped from mane to tail and carried high-rimmed saddles with flaring horns and breech-bands. The stirrups were large, square and boxlike, bound with iron. Behind the saddles were canvas saddlebags filled with bread and cheese, meat, knives, forks, spoons, apples and nuts.

The first leg of their journey was to Coruña, and they set off "over very bad roads and very high mountains," looking, Thaxter thought, rather like Don Quixotes and Sancho Panzas. Beyond the first rim of mountains were rich fields with orchards of orange and lemon and many nut trees. After twelve hours the weary party reached Coruña. There the officials of the Crown seemed to be mostly Irishmen who professed the greatest friendship for the American cause. Anyone who was an enemy of the British was automatically a friend of theirs. The Governor, Don Patricio O'Hara, an Irishman, told Adams that he had "orders from court to treat all Americans as their best friends." In consequence Adams and Dana and the boys were royally entertained, discussed American affairs with the Governor and rambled about the town, visiting the Tour de Fer, an ancient lighthouse of stone, and several of the town's three monasteries and two convents. One of the nunneries was of the Capuchin order, "very austere. . . . The girls eat no meat, wear no linen, sleep on the floor, never on a bed; their faces are always covered with a veil and they never speak to anybody," Adams noted.

The little party went to the armory and "saw the magazines, arsenals, shops . . . carpenters, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, etc." They dined with the French consul and an assemblage of local dignitaries and had delicious pork and bacon (the pigs John found upon inquiry had been fed chestnuts) and "every luxury . . . Bordeaux, Champagne, Burgundy, Sherry, Alicant, Navarre, and Vin de Cap, the most delicious in the world." Adams discussed American imports and Spanish exports, had tea in the English fashion and watched, fascinated, as the ladies drank chocolate in the Spanish style. First came a pitcher with a number of tumblers of "clean, clear glass, full of cold water, and a plate of cakes, which were light pieces of sugar. Each lady took a tumbler of water and a piece of sugar, dipped her sugar in her tumbler of water, ate the one and drank the other. The servant then brought in another salver of cups and hot chocolate. Each lady took a cup and drank it, and cakes and bread and butter were served; each lady took another cup of cold water, and here ended the repast."

Christmas Day, Adams took leave of the Governor of the province and the chief dignitaries of the town; the following day the company set out in their calashes on the long trip north. The little caravan crawled tortuously up narrow mountain passes, over crumbling ledges, across rocks, gulleys, and washouts, breaking axles and smashing wheels in their jolting progress. They passed shepherds driving scraggly mountain sheep, small neat fields and ancient stone houses as weathered as the hillsides to which they clung, and saw the dark, saturnine faces of the Spanish peasants, full of the silent passion of a proud and poor people.

On they went, a few miles a day, through "the grandest profusion of wild, irregular mountains," mountains that were cultivated, wherever possible, to the summit. They moved past snow-capped peaks and banks of snow along the road, through the thin, cold air, through sudden fog and rain, through the perpetual strangeness of the time-scarred land—five Americans, new men in an old world. They stared and marveled as their countrymen were to do for generations to come, attracted and repelled, awed by the immense palpable presence of the past, dismayed by the dirt, the bad sanitation, the wretched toilet facilities and, above all, by the endless and inescapable human misery. John noted especially the women of Mauregatos, "as fine as squaws, and a great deal more nasty; crucifixes, beads and chains, earrings and finger rings, in silver, brass, glass . . . about their necks."

The roughness of the roads forced a kind of democracy. Sometimes where the road was too bumpy the gentlemen rode the mules and servants walked and other times the whole company dismounted and trudged up steep rises or around hairpin turns. A few bright moments lightened the trip. At Lugo two more of the ubiquitous Irishmen bobbed up—they seemed almost as numerous as the Spaniards. Michael Meagher O'Reilly and Lewis O'Brien presented Adams, as a gesture of Celtic-American solidarity, a meat pie and a mince pie and two bottles of Frontenac wine. But generally Adams found himself depressed, as he had been in France, by the poverty and misery of the people. The country seemed fertile enough, much of it not even cultivated, yet the people were ragged and dirty, ill clothed and poorly housed—their homes "nothing but mire, smoke, fleas and lice." This was the sad, stricken face of the Old World. This was what the New World must never become; what America must teach all men to cast off, to accept no longer as part of the immemorial and unchanging order of things. This was why the American Revolution was important, because it had set out to demonstrate, for the first time in history, that men could live in decency and independency; not in the hopeless dignity of congenital poverty, but in the dream of a new and better day for all the simple people of the world.

The country seemed to Adams to be afflicted by a paralysis of the will. The roads needed only attention to be made easy of access. The fields needed only the application of scientific husbandry to yield up double bounty. The cities needed only commerce and industry to stimulate the ingenuity and emulation of ambitious individuals. Yet all lay as though in a sleep, beautiful and proud through all the dirt and mire. "Nothing appears rich but the churches," Adams wrote; "nobody fat but the clergy."

The lodgings they found along the way were primitive in the extreme. At Castillano they took refuge from a cold, torrential rain in what passed for a roadside inn. It was a two-story house with the chill of the ages in its gray stones. The Americans entered the kitchen, which had "no floor but the ground, and no carpet but straw, trodden into mire by men, hogs, horses, mules, etc." In the middle of the room was a small mound of earth on which a fire burned with pots, kettles and skillets clustered about it. There was no chimney and the smoke, black and glutinous, found its way as best it could (which was not very well) through two holes in the tiled roof where it seemed more rain came in than smoke went out. On one side of the fire was a very large, black sooty flue oven and on the other a kind of packing case filled with straw where the master of the house, his wife and four children "all pigged in together." The stable opened off the kitchen; the same earth and miry straw covered that floor where the party's mules stood munching thin straw. The smoke was so thick that it was hard to see across the kitchen. It penetrated every room and stung the eyes and filled the lungs. Around the lethal fire sat the landlord, his wife and children, all the travelers and their servants and the mule drivers. About the room through the haze Adams could make out strings of dry Indian corn hanging overhead upon sticks. In one corner was a bin of oats and in another a bin of colza seeds. Piled against the wall were several bushels of chestnuts. The two small windows of the room were without glass, covered only by shutters. The floor, such as it was, had not been washed or swept for a hundred years by Adams' calculation. "Yet amidst all these horrors," he wrote, "I slept better than I have done . . . since my arrival in Spain."

On the way to Leon, on the Asturian plain, they passed great flocks of sheep, handsome animals with thick, long, fine wool. In the city it was the day of the Feast of the King and John and the two boys saw the celebration of high mass, the procession of the Bishop and all of the canons in their robes of silk, velvet, silver and gold. As the Bishop proceeded around the cathedral he raised his hand in a blessing to the people, who knelt as he passed. "Our guide," Adams noted, "told us we must do the same; but I contented myself with a bow." Even the uses of diplomacy could hardly require a Puritan to kneel before a Catholic prelate.

Everywhere there were convents and monasteries. It seemed to Adams as though half the population of Spain must be within their walls—Benedictine, Franciscan, Augustinian, Dominican, Recollet, Carmelite, Trinitarian, Conception and so on, without end. In Burgos alone there were eighteen convents (eight for women, ten for men and fifteen for "*parroquais*") in addition to churches, chapels and religious houses to the number of thirty-three in all. "Houses of drones," Adams called them. The grandees (absentee landlords who lived at the court in Madrid with the King) and the clergy, he wrote, "exhaust the people to such a degree, I have no idea of the possibility of greater wretchedness."

Passing through one small village they saw for the first time a brighter face of Spain—"the young people, men and women, dancing a dance they call the fandango. One of the young women," Adams wrote, "beats a machine, somewhat like a section of a drum. It is covered with parchment. She sings and beats her drum, and the company dance, with each a pair of clackers in his and her hand. The clackers are two pieces of wood cut handsomely enough, which they have the art to rattle in their hands to the time of the drum." The men and women wore stilted wooden shoes which clattered rhythmically on the stony streets. When the Americans stopped to watch, a man came up to them with a bottle of wine and offered them drinks of a thin, bitter liquor.

The journey began at last to wear on Adams' nerves. It was maddening, their slow progress through this land as alien as the moon. The cold, raw weather gave everyone bad colds; Johnny and Charles sniffled and sneezed and looked red-eyed and feverish. The inevitable filthy smoke-filled inns at the end of an exhausting day of travel were the last straw.

Adams grew snappish and short-tempered, raised his voice with the Spanish drivers and barked at the children. It seemed as though they were all involved in a bad dream. Poor Thaxter, not a vigorous or masculine man and more at home exchanging compliments with Abigail or dancing polite if not ardent attendance on the young ladies of Braintree, was completely inadequate to the occasion, as helpless as one of the children, indeed even more so. He understood neither Spanish nor French (for which it was unfair of Adams to denounce him since he had known of these deficiencies when he engaged him); John wrote with obvious irritation, "He don't seem to think himself obliged to do anything but get along and write in his journal." That and play with Charles and Johnny, parading in his Paris wig and brandishing a sword he had brought with him.

Even the American servants were infected by a general listlessness and indifference. Everything—the dirt, the strange language, the extraordinary people—seemed too much to cope with. The whole party, in their hearts, blamed Adams for dragging them off on this mad, cross-country expedition in the middle of winter rather than waiting for a ship to carry them in comfort to Brest or Nantes. The trip, quite unnecessary if Adams could have restrained his impatience for a few weeks, was a kind of agonizing memorial to his conscientiousness, and also, perhaps, to his vanity and his self-righteousness. Somewhere, someone might have said, "Aha, look at John Adams; put in at Ferrol in a leaky ship and instead of pressing on about his business, loitered there six weeks, enjoying himself and living high off the hog, courted by the local officialdom and keeping court like a petty prince."

He carried his indignation to his journal and, reacting as most men would in similar circumstances, blamed his troubles on everyone but himself. "It is five and twenty years that I have been almost constantly journeying and voyaging, and I have undergone severe trials, great hardships, cold, wet, heat, fatigue, bad rest, want of sleep, bad nourishment, etc., etc. But I never experienced anything like this journey. Every individual person in the company has a great cold," he added. "We go along sneezing and coughing, as if we were fitter for an hospital than travelers on the road. . . . My patience was never so near being exhausted as at present. . . . In short, I am in a deplorable situation, indeed. I know not what to do. I know not where to go."

Finally, after more than two weeks on the road, the party reached Bilbao, on the Bay of Biscay, looking across to the southern coast of France. Here life was somewhat more endurable. Although the colds and coughs persisted and the company was forced to do without "those comforts and conveniences to which we had all been accustomed from the cradle," and without "that sweet and quiet repose in sleep, upon which health and happiness so much depend," there was a decent tavern and a half dozen American sea captains and merchants in the city who made them welcome.

In Bilbao, Adams took the time to write an eight-page letter to Congress informing that body of the geography, trade and commerce, legal system and political administration of the provinces through which he had passed. A New England farmer traveling through Leon and Castile noted with envy the Spanish sheep "with the most beautiful fleeces of wool in the world." American trade might well be opened with these regions. Rice, tar, pitch, turpentine, tobacco, wheat, flour, ship timber, masts, yards and bowsprits might be exchanged for wine, oils, fruits, silks, linens and a quantity of that gorgeous wool which now went to other countries.

After five days' rest Adams pushed the little troop on toward their destination and two days later they arrived at the French town of St. Jean de Luz. It was a joyful moment. At last Adams had reached his second home. "Never," he wrote, "was a captive escaped from prison more delighted than I was; for everything was clean, sweet and comfortable, in comparison of anything we had found in any part of Spain."

At Bayonne, Adams paid off and dismissed the Spanish guides with their train of horses, calashes, mules and drivers. "To do them justice," he noted, "they had always shown a disposition to assist and be friendly to the utmost of their power." He then purchased an easy-riding post-chaise, hired two others, loaded the baggage, and set out for Bordeaux. "We found the entertainment at all the inns comfortable," he wrote; "the horses and carriages as alert and convenient as they are commonly in France."

Bordeaux was France with all its familiar graces and delights. The Americans luxuriated there for the better part of three days and then set off through the great vineyard country, serene but nevertheless beautiful in its winter aspect, the twisted grapevines marching precisely along the hillsides, the soil varying from red loam to a "fine, black, fat, mellow mold" as farmer Adams enviously described it.[5]

XXXIII

On February 9, after a journey of more than a thousand miles lasting over six weeks, Adams and his traveling companions arrived in Paris. They put up at the Hôtel de Valois where, John noted, the Prince of Hesse-Cassel was also staying. The next day, after putting the boys in Monsieur Pechigny's academy, he went with Francis Dana to Passy. There he spent several hours with Franklin and then visited Versailles to pay his respects to Vergennes, Sartine and Count de Maurepas. He would never have guessed from the Foreign Minister's smiling affability that his mission was unwelcome. Indeed, he came away much heartened. "It is sufficient for me to say," he wrote Congress, "that I never heard the French minister so frank, so explicit, so decided as each of these gentlemen was in the course of his conversation in his declarations to pursue the war with vigor and to afford effectual aid to the United States." The government had sent arms and clothing for fifteen thousand men; seventeen warships had been dispatched to the West Indies and more were to follow. To Adams' request that he might write him more specifically concerning his mission, Vergennes "cheerfully and politely" acquiesced.[1]

Adams consequently sat down, confident of the Foreign Minister's interest and good will, to give an account of his instructions. "I am persuaded," he wrote, "it is the intention of my constituents and of all America, and I am sure it is my own determination, to take no steps of consequence in pursuance of my commissions without consulting His Majesty's ministers." One of the first questions, on which he asked Vergennes's advice, was how best to announce his "appointment and powers" to negotiate a treaty to the world at large and especially to the British court.[2]

Vergennes, disappointed that Adams rather than Franklin had been appointed minister plenipotentiary, and suspicious, as we have noted, of Adams' own motives, set himself to block and frustrate, so far as he could, Adams' mission. His first move was to reply with a subtle and studied insult that should have warned Adams of the trouble lying ahead. As to the purpose and nature of Adams' mission, Vergennes preferred to wait for the return of Gérard, "because he is probably the bearer of your instructions and will certainly be able to make me better acquainted with the nature and extent of your commission." In the meantime, Vergennes wrote, he should conceal his commission and, above all, be sure that London should not find out about it.

Having written thus to Adams, Vergennes set to work to have the American's commission to negotiate a commercial treaty with Britain canceled and Adams himself neutralized by the addition of other ministers. This he undertook to do through Luzerne, meanwhile stalling off Adams' increasingly urgent inquiries. Given Vergennes's misunderstanding of Adams' own position, his actions were not unnatural. As French Foreign Minister, it made him most uneasy to have the negotiations for a peace treaty in the hands of a man who he was convinced was more favorably inclined to the British enemy than to his French allies. Of the bitter divisions and interminable wrangles in Congress, the Count was kept well if not entirely accurately informed by Gérard. In addition, there was the fact, thoroughly irritating to Vergennes, that Adams insisted on regarding the United States as an equal partner with France rather than as a humble subordinate.

Vergennes replied to Adams' further queries with an assent to Adams' making known "the principal object of your mission—I mean your future pacification." This might properly be announced when he was presented to the King. As for the powers that authorized him to negotiate a treaty of commerce with Britain, Vergennes requested Adams to keep them secret "and to take every precaution that the British ministry may not have a premature knowledge of them." On all these points Adams acquiesced without protest. But, forwarding copies of the correspondence to Congress, he could not forbear to note that "the delicacy of the Count de Vergennes about communicating my powers is not perfectly consonant to my manner of thinking." Left to his own judgment, he would have pursued a bolder plan "by communicating, immediately after my arrival, to Lord George Germain my full powers to treat both of peace and commerce." He had felt it his duty, however, to act in concert with his country's ally.[3]

Adams' contest with Vergennes was, from the first, an unequal one; a struggle in which Adams was doomed to a humiliating defeat. Congress, increasingly inept, unable to finance a war that it was unable to win, was most sensitive to French pressure. Luzerne, a subtle and ingenious diplomat, ingratiating and imperious by turns, knew very well how to employ the steel fist in the velvet glove, knew just when to remind the harassed delegates of the enormous support that His Majesty was so generously contributing to the cause, just when to speak a little sharply of Congress' own duties and obligations and to hint that his great and powerful master, the King, viewing things from his Olympus, might be displeased at a lack of gratitude or courtesy. The members of Congress had no knowledge of diplomacy or the practice of courts and ministers. They were inclined to lean, as much as they dared, on the representative of their distinguished ally and protector. Luzerne was thus able to play like a master musician on the fears and the sensibilities and, perhaps above all, on the inexperience of the delegates to the Continental Congress.

Adams, three thousand miles away, had no chance. He could do nothing but watch his powers whittled away as the months passed. The fact was that he had for a considerable time only the vaguest notion of what was going on. His trust and confidence in Vergennes's good will and good intentions died slowly as the consequence of an accumulation of minor setbacks and rebuffs whose implications he at first ignored.

Suspicious as he was of Adams, Vergennes tried to sound him out on his attitude toward a separate peace with Great Britain. Adams replied in the most emphatic terms that he would make no separate peace. If Vergennes wished, he would listen with as much politeness as he could to any overtures made by the British government or its agents, "but it would require much philosophy to hear with patience such absurd and extravagant propositions as are published in pamphlets and newspapers and made in Parliament, even by the members of the opposition, who profess to be most zealous for peace. Our alliance with France," Adams added, "is an honor and a security which have ever been near to my heart. . . . I have ever thought it . . . a natural alliance, and contended for it as a rock of defense."[4]

To Adams' letter Vergennes replied with assurance of "the confidence we place in your principles and [the] security we feel beforehand as to the conduct you will hold in case the court of London should propose to you overtures of conciliation."[5]

As Holland, Sweden and Denmark joined Russia in the policy of armed neutrality, England began to consider ways of detaching America from Spain and France. But the measures that the British were inclined to put forth fell far short of the expectations of the United States. "All schemes of reconciliation with America short of independence," Adams wrote his English correspondent, Thomas Digges, "and all plans for peace with America allowing her independence separate from her allies are visionary and delusive, disingenuous, corrupt and wicked. America has taken her equal station and she will behave with as much honor as any of the nations of the earth. To say that the Americans are upon the poise, are balancing, and will return to their alliance to the King of England is as wild as bedlam." The Americans had "higher notions of themselves than ever. They think they have gone through the greatest revolution that ever took place among men; that this revolution is as much for the generality of mankind in Europe as for their own." To reverse themselves at this juncture would be to counteract "the designs of Providence, as well as betray . . . their posterity and mankind."[6]

Adams, reading the life of Louis XV in four volumes, found in it ample confirmation of his view of the mutual benefits of the French-American alliance. "When we see," he wrote Jenings, "the distress, the ruin, the humiliation and debasement of the French nation and monarchy up to the very moment when America was severed from Great Britain and began to cultivate a good understanding with France, when we see that from the same moment France began to revive . . . America ought to appear in her own eyes, as well as those of the French and the rest of the world, as a nation and country whose friendship and alliance is worth cultivating." He did not mean by this to diminish the glory of the reigning monarch who had seen the opportunity to restore France's power and taken advantage of it.[7]

Beside his sparring with Vergennes over the nature of his instructions, Adams had little or nothing to do, which was of course intolerable. He had a secretary for his legation, Dana, and a personal secretary, Thaxter. They must all be occupied if Adams was not to suffer daily from the feeling that he was living off Congress and performing, meanwhile, no useful service. The answer lay in letters. He had already pledged himself to write fully to Congress concerning events abroad. With nothing else, at least for the moment, to engage him, he turned to letter writing with all of his considerable energy. Letters poured out in a torrent, a dozen a day: long official letters to Congress, full of detail, of fact and rumor, analyzing, weighing, advising, exhorting; letters to friends in Congress and out; letters to English friends favorable to the American cause—to Thomas Digges, his book agent in London, to Edmund Jenings, who professed devotion to the United States, to Charles Dumas, American agent at The Hague; to anyone and everyone.

He wrote Congress that Rodney was coming with a British fleet to do what mischief he could by burning and pillaging along the American seacoast, adding, "My business is peace, but I think of nothing but war. While our enemies think of nothing else, we ought not to think more of peace than to be ready to treat of it, as soon as it shall be put into the hearts of our foes to be willing for it. Americans must be soldiers, they must war by land and sea; they have no other security."[8]

Adams enlisted the Marquis de Lafayette to help him track down rumors that Russia was about to dispatch thousands of soldiers to fight in America against Washington's army, and to elicit from the Foreign Office information that was not available to Adams or that he hesitated to ask for himself. The prospects for his mission were darkened by the arrival of word of a series of British successes: the failure of General Lincoln and Count d'Estaing in their amphibious operation designed to oust the British from Charleston; the defeat of a Spanish fleet in South American waters; and the capture by Admiral Rodney of a convoy of Spanish transports off Gibraltar.

To Samuel Adams, John wrote a précis of European news and a comment upon the spread of committees of correspondence, originally conceived by Samuel, to Ireland and England, where they were being used effectively by the enemies of the government to rally resistance. He was especially anxious for news of the fate of his constitution. "I assure you," he added, "it is more comfortable making constitutions in the dead winter at Cambridge or Boston than sailing in a leaky ship or climbing on foot or upon mules over the mountains of Galicia and the Pyrenees."[9]

The news of the Massachusetts constitution when it came was on the whole most encouraging to Adams. The only major change in his draft was in the power of the legislature to override the executive veto by a two-thirds vote of both houses. If Adams was not inclined to concede that this and the other minor changes improved the plan, he acknowledged that they would "contribute much to its acceptance," adding, "Upon the whole I think the constitution will be very good. . . . The substitute for the Governor's negative is generally thought an amelioration," he wrote Jonathan Jackson, "and I confess it is so wisely guarded that it has quite reconciled me." There was nothing which he dreaded so much "as division of the Republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader and concerting measures in opposition to each other. This, in my humble apprehension, is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our constitution. . . . The convention I shall ever recollect with veneration."[10]

The Massachusetts constitution received high praise in France, especially the article on religion. "They compliment Massachusetts with having outdone all other outdoings, in this respect," he informed William Gordon. He had meant well with his original article, but "his countrymen, who mean equally well, saw further as they have often done," he admitted philosophically. It seemed to him, moreover, that beyond any of the other states Massachusetts had taken the case to the people, so to speak, "a phenomenon in the political world that is new and singular." The interminable delay in drafting a constitution, which had so alarmed him, now appeared as an asset. His fellow Bay Staters were "the first people who have taken so much time to deliberate upon government—that have allowed such universal liberty to all people to reflect upon the subject, and to propose objections and amendments—and that have reserved to themselves at large the right of finally accepting or rejecting the form." To Adams it was an "epoch in the history of the progress of society."

To James Wilson, who had complimented him on his role in drafting the constitution, he replied: "I never spent six weeks in a manner that I shall ever reflect upon with more pleasure than with that society of wise men who composed that convention. So much caution, moderation, sagacity and integrity has not often been together in the world." Again, he wrote, "no government was ever so perfectly made upon the principle of the people's right and equality. It is Sidney, Locke, Rousseau and Mably reduced to practice in the first instance."[11]

Adams responded to James Warren's suggestion that he was to be envied for his diplomatic post in Paris with an inventory of the hardships he had endured. There was little to be envied in such trials and hazards. Envy itself was a terrible distemper. Adams thought he would rather be infected with the French pox, "contracted here by an acquaintance with the elegant nymphs of the boulevards," than with envy.[12]

From William Gordon, preacher turned historian, Adams had received an irresistible appeal for information about the course of the Revolutionary struggle. After replying to his inquiries he added a special word for Gordon, "Mr. Historiographer." Gordon must tell "Prince Posterity one truth for me and that is that I love my wife, and that I have left her to see countries where I don't find anybody I like so well, to serve my country." What motive, he asked, would Gordon assign to him? "Ambition, I suppose, and the love of glory, like Tacitus and the rest of the malignant row of impartial historians, who will never allow any higher motive to govern men. But if you don't tell the Prince aforesaid," Adams added, "that I had not enough of this taste for glory to make me leave my wife and children, and that nothing but a sense of duty, added to all the [ambition] I have, could have produced this effect, you will want penetration to discover the motives of one heart, and I will undertake to tell Posterity myself that you are not a perfect historian. And this Prince will believe me as soon as you. I suspect I shall be obliged to turn historiographer too."[13]

But he had little encouragement for Gordon's historiographical undertakings. It was Adams' opinion that it would take "the labor of thirty years for a writer of the first talents" to collect the materials and write "a full, complete and impartial history" of the Revolution. There were so many popular prejudices abroad and so much that could not yet be told that it was his conviction it would be fifty years before the truth could be revealed to the public. Indeed, it sometimes seemed to him that there had been so much "quackery and exaggeration, so much puff and vapor" that the truth could never be "fully distilled from the dregs."[14]

Adams' friend, Abbé Reynal, had told him that he was publishing a new edition of his universal history and that he had inserted in it "the complete history of our Revolution." He had mentioned Adams' name "as one of the characters without which the Revolution would not have been accomplished." At the same time he warned Adams that he had taken him to task for what he considered some of his errors. Adams was anxious to see the references to himself but Reynal was coy. If, Adams replied, he had ascribed to him "a neat fifth" of the responsibility for bringing on the Revolution, he had credited him with far too much. "A thousandth part of it is not my due," he protested. But the shrewd Abbé was doubtless aware that Adams protested too much and was in truth highly flattered to be cast in a leading role. John, mentioning the conversation in a letter to James Warren, wrote somewhat morosely, "I wish I were at home that I might do something worthy of history; here I can do nothing. The beauteous olive branch will never decorate my brows. I must spend my life in the pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war, without sharing any of its laurels." Then he added facetiously but with far more truth than he or the subject could have foreseen, "My most profound respect to Mrs. Warren—I dread her history more than that of the Abbé."

To the lady herself, he wrote that he grew "every day more and more wearied and disgusted with Europe, and more and more impatient to return forever to that country where alone I ever was or shall be happy. . . . How much should we deplore that spirit of dissipation, vanity and knavery which infects so many Americans and threatens to ruin our manners and liberties in imitation of the Old World!"[15]

The collection of news from Great Britain and the forwarding of it to Congress became one of Adams' principal preoccupations. Through the London bookseller, Thomas Digges, he received periodic reports of the temper of the British government, but his most faithful source of intelligence was Edmund Jenings, living in Brussels, who poured forth a stream of information about the day-to-day developments across the Channel. Adams used Jenings to plant articles in the British press and Jenings in turn procured copies to forward to Adams: the London *Courant and Westminster Chronicle;* the *General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer,* a Whig paper favorable to the American cause; and the *Morning Post,* which referred to Adams as "the Rebel Chieftain" and breathed fire and destruction to the American states. Rodney and Clinton would soon scourge the rebels up and down the land, the *Post* assured its readers. Then let them sue for peace. But not with John Adams, "the most obnoxious [rebel] of them all; for poor King Hancock was only his dupe." Adams read the squib and smiled. That would gall Hancock grievously.

Adams was especially sensitive to the value of publicity. In this respect England far outdid France. The English newspapers carried a great volume of information, much of it erroneous to be sure, but the effect was, in Adams' view, to excite the spirits and support the morale of the people. The French press was severely restricted and in fact hardly existed at all except as an instrument of the court, employed for official and semi-official notes. To Genet, who controlled the press, Adams pointed out the advantages of the English system. "Their newspapers," he wrote, "propagate everything favorable to them all over Europe immediately, whereas the limitations upon the press in this country prevent us from much of this advantage." The English officials, their admirals and generals, framed their dispatches with the general public in mind, "for the people," and slanted them in such a way "as to make an impression upon the hopes of their friends and the fears of their enemies, and in this consists full one half of their power."

All governments, Adams argued, depended upon the good will of the people. "The popular tide of joy and hope and confidence carries away armies and navies to great exertion, for officers and armies and navies are but people." Defeat and bad news or unhappy rumor destroyed the moral not only of armies but of "the tradesmen, artificers and laborers" who must ultimately support them. The British had to employ falsehood and fiction to sustain the spirits of their people; the French had only to circulate the truth to produce the same effect.

Adams volunteered his own services as a propagandist for the allied cause. He had time on his hands and he would be glad to put it to use in such an enterprise. It would be little enough in any event; neither of the French newspapers had anything like a mass circulation: the *Gazette de France* reached a small if important audience; the more widely read *Mercure* was published only once a week and could give little space to political news. Genet replied, welcoming Adams' "Essays" as he called them, and promising him accommodation in the *Mercure*.[16]

Adams could do little enough against the restrictive policy of the French government and he expressed his irritation to Gerry. "They communicate nothing to the public," he wrote, "the people being of no consideration in public councils—they leave the public to pick up intelligence in scraps from England, Holland, America, Spain, anywhere and anyhow!" But newspapers were only part of the story. Adams complained bitterly of the lack of communication on all levels. The French government never passed on to Franklin or to him news about affairs in America. Vergennes kept his own council and Adams, like the French people, had to get his information where he could, most often from the English papers sent by Thomas Digges.

Below the level of diplomatic correspondence and formal visits and dinners, life went on much as it had during Adams' earlier stay. He visited and was visited in turn. He dined with his old friends, the Abbés. The Count d'Estaing, home from his disastrous foray against Charleston, dined with him and Adams took the occasion to press his favorite theme—the need for the French to command the American coastal waters.[17]

With time on his hands, Adams set out systematically to conquer Paris. He would explore a portion of the city every day until he knew it as well as Braintree. Stevens carried him in the post-chaise all about Paris and its environs—the Palais Royal, the gardens of the Tuileries, the Place de Louis XV, the Place Victoire, the Place Vendôme, the noble squares with their equestrian statues, the city's working-class quarter, the grand apartments along the Champs Elysées—until at last he had traversed all that marvelous prospect.

Charles and John Quincy at school in Passy spent their weekends and holidays with their father. He took them about the city with him, commented on the ancient and historic, conversed with them in French, examined them on Latin. Charles, lively and adaptable, did well in his schoolwork. His blond, almost white hair made him a special object of notice. "He is as well beloved here as at home," John wrote Abigail. "Wherever he goes everybody loves him"; in another letter he noted that Charles, usually so delicate, was "hardy as a flint. . . . He is a delightful little fellow. I love him too much."

Adams and the boys dined with the Abbés Chalut and Arnoux, and Charles sang for them, "like Orpheus," Chalut exclaimed. John Quincy was "more solid and steady than ever," having apparently cast off all his youthful giddiness. John went with the boys to see the King's gardens at Versailles, acres of formal walks, handsome trees, and carefully tended shrubbery; and the cabinet of natural history, "*cabinet d'histoire naturelle,*" he wrote, showing off his French, "a great collection of metals, minerals, shells, insects, birds, beasts, fishes and precious stones." They were all carefully arranged "with the name of everything, beautifully written on a piece of paper, annexed to it." There was also a collection of medicinal herbs, roots and vegetables, "and indeed of all the plants and trees in the world. A fine scene for the studious youths in physic and philosophy." When, he wondered, would America have such collections?[18]

Although he was only a short coach ride away from Passy, John included his eldest son among his correspondents. He wished him to give an account of his studies so that he could help him work to the best advantage. John Quincy replied, giving his daily schedule: "Make Latin; explain Cicero, Erasmus; pierce Phaedrus; learn Greek Racines; Greek grammar; geography; geometry; fractions; writing; drawing. As a young boy cannot apply himself to all those things and keep a remembrance of them all," John Quincy wrote, "I should desire you would let me know what of those I must begin upon at first." Then he signed his name like a miniature John Hancock, with a flourish and a swirl, and put a wig over the A in Adams.

"I have received your letter, giving an account of your studies for a day," his father replied, adding, "You should have dated your letter."

Greek he must give special attention to "because the most perfect models of fine writing in history, oratory and poetry are to be found in the Greek language." The geography, geometry and fractions could wait; his principal efforts should go to mastery of "the Latin and Greek tongues. . . . I hope soon to hear that you are in Virgil and Tully's Orations, or Ovid, or Horace, or all of them. I am, my dear child, your affectionate Father. P.S. The next time you write to me, I hope you will take more care to write well—can't you keep a steadier hand?" He must use lined paper and eschew all ornate flourishes. The next letter from John Quincy, dealing with Charles's labor among irregular French verbs, won temperate praise from John, but the following one was sloppily written and John sent it back to be copied over. "I will not overlook one such heedless piece of work," he wrote. "I have suffered too many inconveniences myself from writing a bad hand all my life to neglect your education in this particular as mine was. [It was true that the elder Adams wrote an erratic, rather childish hand.] Let me give you one piece of advice more," he went on, perhaps thinking of Hancock, "which is not to spend much of your time in learning to flourish with your pen. Ornaments of this kind, if not done with very great skill, are worse than none."[19]

With Abigail always on his mind, Adams sent little remembrances with his letters to her—a yard of fine cambric, eight India handkerchiefs, a yard of gay ribbon. The dozen damask tablecloths that Abigail had asked for could not be purchased without napkins. He shopped for Delft china and stoneware for her and then tried to find a way to send them.[20]

Reveling in Paris, as he did, he felt the ambiguity that had earlier troubled him, the pull of contrarities, the well-nigh inextricable mixture of good and evil. "There is everything here," he wrote Abigail, "that can inform the understanding or refine the taste, and indeed, one would think, that could purify the heart. Yet it must be remembered there is everything here, too, which can seduce, betray, deceive, deprave, corrupt and debauch it." The children, he prayed, would follow the thorny path of virtue, but he trembled at the "siren song of sloth, lest they should be captivated with her bewitching charms and her soft, insinuating music."[21]

Much as he wished that America might have such beauty, he was bound to reflect that it was "not indeed the fine arts which our country requires," but "the useful, the mechanic arts," road and canal building, ship and factory building, bridge building, engineering, the techniques of commerce and finance and, above all, of government. "The science of government it is my duty to study," he wrote Abigail, "more than all other sciences; the arts of legislation and administration and negotiation ought to take the place of, indeed to exclude, in a manner, all other arts. I must study politics and war, that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history and naval architecture, navigation, commerce and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry and porcelain."[22]

In Braintree, Abigail lived as best she could with her loneliness and her anxieties. They grew no lighter with time, rather the reverse—each fresh separation seemed harder to bear. Now, in addition to John and John Quincy, she had lost Charles, especially dear to her. He was so young and so frail to depart on such a journey—her heart ached to think of it. She wrote him a tender letter enjoining him to "modest obliging behavior," and adding, "You was a favorite in the neighborhood at home, all of whom wonder how Mamma could part with you." He must try to become "useful to society and happy to yourself."[23]

To John Quincy, as befitted his greater maturity, she wrote a long letter of precept and admonition. He had survived the trip to France, she reminded him, only through God's providence. "If you have a due sense of your preservation," she added, "your next consideration will be for what purpose you are continued in life." It was not to roam from one place to another "to gratify an idle curiosity." Every "new mercy" was a new debt upon him, a new obligation to "a diligent discharge of the various relations in which you stand connected"; to his God, to society, "in particular to your country," and to his parents and himself. He must consider every moment of his time as precious, nor should he spend too much of it in recreation which would never afford him "that permanent satisfaction which the acquisition of one art or science will give."

Her son must come to know himself; it was "one of the most useful lessons of life—the knowledge and study of yourself." There one ran the greatest hazard of being deceived—"self-love and partiality cast a mist before the eyes, and there is no knowledge so hard to be acquired nor of more benefit when once thoroughly understood." Proud as she was of him, he had some weaknesses that would bear correction. He lived in great times and such times demanded greatness in turn. Cicero would not have been so distinguished an orator if he had not been inspired by the tyranny of a Catiline and by Mark Antony. These moments formed "the character of the hero and the statesman." He must measure himself by such a standard and he must take pains to correct his greatest failing —his "impetuosity of temper." She would not, of course, call it his father's failing or even name it so in her heart. She had often chided John Quincy for his rashness; she had seen him improve and she was sure he would continue to grow in self-mastery. "You, my dear son," she concluded, "are formed with a constitution feelingly alive. Your passions are strong and impetuous. Yet though I have sometimes seen them hurry you into escapades, yet with pleasure I have observed a frankness and generosity accompanying your efforts to govern and subdue them."[24]

Abigail chafed at the thin trickle of news from Europe and especially from John. She clung to the hope that the year would bring peace and derived what comfort she could from the thought that "the welfare and happiness of this wide-extended country, ages yet unborn, depend for their happiness and security upon the able and skillful, the honest and upright discharge of the important trust committed to him. . . . My constant petition for him is that he may so discharge the trust reposed in him as to merit the approving eye of Heaven, and peace, liberty, and safety crown his latest years in his own native land." She reminded her husband how she treasured every little assurance of affection in his letters.[25]

In the wings lurked the Iago-like Lovell, once more writing his sinuous and artful letters. He sent her the Journals of Congress which she had requested and wrote, "How *do* you do, lovely Portia, these very cold days? Mistake me not willfully; I said days." For himself though he shivered in his chilly apartment, he refrained from coveting his neighbor's blankets. "But really I doubt," he added, "whether I shall be able to keep myself void of all covetousness. I suspect I shall covet to be in the arms of Portia [here the page ended, and Abigail, turning over, read] 's friend and admirer—the wife of my bosom. . . . There was not room," he continued, "to write *turn over*. I hope, however, that you did not stop long without doing so, madam, because a quick turnover alone could save the tenth commandment entire; and you must now see plainly that I had not the smallest suspicion of my being driven by my present sufferings to make a frantic breach there."

Lovell referred Abigail to Ecclesiastes 4:11. She could not forbear to open her Bible and read the words, suddenly wicked and insinuating: "Again, if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone?"[26] No man had ever written her in such language. She was embarrassed and indignant, stirred by feelings that were unfamiliar to her, a feeling of disloyalty in even reading the dashing, confident handwriting, a sense of guilt, of being the inadvertent partner in a dangerous but strangely exciting game. Lovell, after all, was four hundred miles away. A woman in her thirty-sixth year, however happily married, is secretly pleased to be courted, to be complimented and made love to, especially by mail, though she may have not the slightest thought of yielding to such importunings. To be praised and desired is to be reassured that one is not impossibly matronly at thirty-five. Abigail was herself a flirt, but James Lovell was a good deal more than she had bargained for. Confused and frightened at the risk he ran in sending such a letter through the mail, she declared him, a little archly, to be "a wicked man," and took the line that his remarks were simply a satire on

Sterne's *Tristam Shandy*, which they had discussed in earlier letters and which Abigail had refused to read on the grounds that it was "too vile." She thus turned the epistolary conversation into the safe channel of literary criticism. The English novelist had a ribald vein "but . . . intermixed with a rich stream of benevolence flowing like milk and honey. . . . Possessed of an exquisite sensibility, a universal philanthropy—what a perverse genius must he have to hazard those fine powers and talents for a wicked wit," she wrote.

Nonetheless she shuddered at her friend's temerity in writing such indiscreet passages. "I have charity enough for the writer," she added, "to believe that his associates have been wholly of his own sex for three years past, or he could not have so offended." He must destroy her letter, she wrote, as she had already destroyed his. But she had not. She put it carefully away with her other letters, and continued to write and to sign herself "Portia."[27]

Lovell, bland and specious, replied with an air of injured innocence. What had he said to cause offense? Would the "lovely moralist" send him the offensive letters with names and dates cut out for safety's sake, so that he could see wherein he had erred? "My head and heart," he vowed, "have known no moment in which esteem for Mrs. Adams has not been joined with their affection for Portia. And, if my pen has been untrue to that union, may a whitlow punish the fingers that moved it. . . . While in winter I speak to virgin Portia only about the keen air of the days and the comfort of my domestic fireside; may I not to the married Lucretia take notice of the lonesome tedious nights, and lament separation from my own faithful mate? I am sure something is wrong. I am anxious to know the degree."[28] He managed to make even his protestation a love letter, but Abigail expressed herself satisfied with his disavowal. The letters continued, more discreet but still ardent.

XXXIV

IN MARCH, a month after his arrival in Paris, Adams was presented by Vergennes to the King and repeated the ceremonious visits to the members of the royal family and the chief ministers of the government that he had made on his earlier trip. He was now free to make public the nature of his mission, but again Vergennes did all he could to delay the announcement, and Adams grew increasingly restless at the restraint. The prospect of peace seemed daily more remote and the problem of finances was acute. Adams had left a trail of drafts on Congress behind him in his journey through Spain and France and, knowing the chronic improvidence of Congress, he fretted constantly over their payment. In addition, he was forced to borrow in Paris without any assurance that funds would be forthcoming to pay his debts. "I wish to know your private opinion," he wrote Lovell, "whether Congress will continue Mr. Dana and me here at so much expense, with so little prospect of having anything to do for a long time . . . or whether they will revoke our powers and recall us; or what they will do with us." His present situation was irksome, yet he would submit to it if Congress felt he could be of service. In the meantime he continued to "transmit intelligence" until Congress must have been tempted to find some better employment for him simply to stop the tide of correspondence.[1]

Adams heard from Digges of the departure of Clinton for Charleston and he waited impatiently for news of the success or failure of that expedition. When word finally reached Paris that Clinton had landed his army and started a campaign through the Southern states, Adams put as cheerful a face on the news as possible. Clinton would be watched and guarded and finally "ruined as Burgoyne was at Saratoga." He was pleased to hear that Gates was to have the Continental command. "I am quite easy since I knew. . . ." he wrote; "there is an affection for him and a confidence in him, a kind of devotion to him, in the mind of every American soldier that makes him infallible."[2]

Adams was encouraged by the growing restlessness of the Dutch merchants under British seizures. The English insisted on their right to stop and search neutral ships for war material, for contraband by British definition. The Dutch, on the other hand, tried to maintain in concert with other neutral nations that free ships made free goods and that the British had no right to search and seize neutral vessels, contraband excepted. Much of the dispute revolved around the question of what constituted a legal blockade according to the law of nations. Britain argued, in effect, that a general control of the seas plus a statement declaring a particular port blockaded was sufficient. Russia and, following her lead, other neutral nations replied that a port could not be considered blockaded unless it was shut up by the warships of a belligerent power.

The settled practice was that neutral goods, except contraband (and contraband was limited to specifically enumerated articles exclusive, generally, of masts and naval supplies), were safe from capture on enemy ships, but that enemy property was subject to capture on neutral ships. More recent practice had been, however, to confiscate enemy property on neutral ships and also neutral property on enemy ships. From this had evolved the doctrine "free ships make free goods, unfree ships, unfree goods." There was a sharp division on what constituted contraband and who should make the decision. The rights of neutrals, moreover, were not considered to permit the carriage of goods of any kind to blockaded ports. What then constituted a blockaded port? Was a simple declaration, "a paper blockade," sufficient to entitle the belligerent power to seize any neutral vessel sailing into a port of its enemy?

The existing Anglo-Dutch treaty stipulated that each power was bound to come to the aid of the other if it was attacked or threatened. It was for this reason—namely that they did not wish to push Holland into a test on the treaty issue—that France and England had avoided any formal declaration of war. Even after the war became general the British refrained from calling on Holland to fulfill its treaty obligations, asking in turn that she not insist on her neutral rights under the treaty. England and France thus contended for the allegiance of Holland.

The conflict was fought out on the diplomatic level between the British ambassador, Sir Joseph Yorke, and his French counterpart, the Duke de la Vauguyon. Yorke relied on his close ties with the hereditary Stadtholder and the merchants engaged in British trade. La Vauguyon, on the other hand, played up the popular resistance to the Stadtholder and his party and emphasized the profits to be made by Amsterdam merchants in the forbidden American trade. The province of Holland was the vulnerable point in the Dutch states. Since all decisions had to be by the unanimous vote of the provinces, the vote of Holland might succeed in maintaining neutral rights under the terms of the treaty while blocking active support of the British against the French. The effect would be to ally the Dutch Republic with France and the United States against

Britain, while of course it would correspondingly free British privateers and warships to seize Dutch vessels on the grounds that the treaty provisions had been violated. This latter risk the Dutch, or at least the Amsterdam Dutch, were willing to run in expectation of large profits for those who eluded the British ships.

On April 11 the Russian ambassador pushed matters toward a resolution by notifying the French court that the Queen, Catherine the Great, was determined that the commerce of her subjects should not be troubled, that Russian vessels should not be stopped by those of the belligerent powers and that she would arm her ships to protect them from seizure.

Yorke, alarmed at the Russian proclamation and at the evidence of vacillation in the Dutch States-General, pressed "their high mightinesses" for a prompt decision on the issue of neutrality. The British were ready to claim the assistance guaranteed by the treaty. What would the answer be? The States-General twisted and turned in an agony of uncertainty, afraid to offend Britain, anxious to retain the friendship and the trade of France, rendered impotent by their own internecine quarrels and rivalries.

Word reached Adams at Paris that a Dutch faction was preparing to reject their country's commitment to England and seek a preferred status in the American trade and a secure place in the fishery; he exploded in a letter to William Lee, "The Dutch may expect what they please—but they will expect it to all eternity, if they expect one iota of exclusive privilege in American trade. I wonder in God's name what obligations we are under to the Dutch? Nor can I conceive what pretensions they can have to the fishery in the Banks of Newfoundland."[3]

There was mild encouragement in the news from home. Congress seemed at last to be stirring itself to bring some kind of order out of the Continental finances. They had called in an earlier emission of two million dollars of paper money and made plans for new issue to redeem the old paper money at a ratio of forty dollars of the old money to one of the new. But the need for money continued to be little short of desperate. The demands on the treasury were met with warrants drawn on the various states which owed sums to Congress. The collection of taxes was being pushed vigorously and it was hoped that enough money would be forthcoming to feed and pay the soldiers, but money for their clothing and equipment, "as well as a considerable loan to serve as a fund for drawing in case of emergency," must come from loans negotiated in Europe.[4]

The reform of the paper currency, about which Gerry had written him, involved Adams in a disagreeable dispute with Vergennes. Vergennes professed to be dismayed at Congress' decision to pay off the loan-office certificates at the ratio of forty to one. This would mean severe losses for French holders of such certificates and would constitute, in effect, a breach of faith with an ally. Adams assured Vergennes that Congress intended to pay off the loan-office certificates "according to the value of money at the time of their being respectively issued." This would lessen the loss to European investors. In addition many of those who had received the congressional certificates had invested them in lands, in bills of exchange, and in produce for export, so that Adams was convinced that the French holders were far fewer than Vergennes imagined.[5]

But to Vergennes it appeared that Congress, by financial sleight of hand, was reducing the two hundred million dollars which it owed to five millions, and that at the cost of its creditors. "I do not presume, sir, to criticize . . . this operation," he wrote coldly, "because I have no right to examine or comment upon the internal arrangements which Congress may consider as just and profitable." Congress might be forced to such action by the desperateness of its situation. What seemed manifestly unfair to the French minister was the fact that strangers as well as citizens of the United States must suffer from the measure. Congress should provide for the indemnification of foreigners. The depreciation of their paper money might well be a means by which Americans supported their struggle for independence but they could not expect others who had invested in good faith to pay equally. French merchants who had run considerable risk to trade with the United States and who had accepted paper money in exchange for sorely needed commodities, instead of finding "that their property [was] as secure and sacred in America as in France itself," discovered that they were "plundered" by an ungrateful or indifferent Congress. "I ask, sir," Vergennes continued, "if . . . this act of Congress is proper to advance the credit of the United States, to inspire confidence in their promises, to invite the European nations to run the same risks to which the subjects of His Majesty have exposed themselves?"[6]

These were strong words and Adams reacted strongly. He replied to Vergennes at length. The depreciation of the paper money was certainly unfortunate. Was he to understand, however, that the minister would go so far as to contend that Congress was obliged to pay the holders of the depreciated currency at the rate of a silver dollar for a paper one? This would be equally unfair, because most of the holders had acquired the currency at a greatly depreciated value. Since it could not be redeemed at face value, the only question was what rate of depreciation should be set. Here there could be no other standard than the existing rate of exchange. From this Adams went on to explain patiently, as though to one poorly informed on the workings of economic laws, why the course that Congress had taken was inevitable and just.

Clearly Vergennes's suggestion that Congress had shown bad faith rankled. Adams was determined to refute it, and in so doing he inevitably (for him at least) adopted the tone of a teacher to a backward child. After reviewing the case in detail, he noted: "No man is more ready than I am to acknowledge the obligations we are under to France; but the flourishing state of her maritime and commerce, and the decisive influence of her councils and negotiations in Europe, which all the world will allow to be owing in a great measure to the separation of America from [France's] inveterate enemy and to her new connections with the United States, show that the obligations are mutual." True or false, these were hardly the terms in which to address the sensitive and imperious Foreign Minister, who looked upon the United States as a very junior partner at best. If Adams had been content to reply deferentially, to put forward a mild rebuttal, and refer the matter to the decision of Congress, Vergennes would doubtless have been mollified. But Adams had jumped to the defense of the indefensible, in Vergennes's view at least. He had made a shambles of the minister's arguments and spoken to him as an equal and an indignant one at that. His response showed quite clearly his ultimate limitation as a diplomat—his temper and combativeness. Vergennes had reflected upon the integrity of Adams' country. He must be rebuked.[7]

To the French minister Adams' "dissertation" contained "only abstract reasonings, hypotheses and calculations which have no real foundation . . . and in fine principles, than which nothing can be less analogous to the alliance subsisting between His Majesty and the United States." After letting the offensive letter lie unanswered for a week during which he solicited Franklin's support for the court position, Vergennes replied curtly: "The details into which you have thought proper to enter have not changed my sentiments; but I think that all further discussion between us on this subject will be needless. . . . His Majesty is the more persuaded that Congress will give their whole attention to this business."[8]

Granting that Adams' letter had been indiscreet, Vergennes's response was unnecessarily severe. It is hard to avoid the feeling that the minister, who was too experienced a hand at the tortuous game of diplomacy to allow himself the luxury of irritation, had decided to use the incident to weaken Adams' position in relation to the French court and, hopefully, to Congress. Adams, after all, had simply tried to present what he assumed to have been the thinking of Congress on the problem. Doubtless he would have done better, particularly if such a small amount of paper money was held by French merchants as he suspected, to placate Vergennes and call for "further study."

Not content to let Vergennes have the last word, Adams answered the minister's sharp note with one of his own, reaffirming his previous view. Franklin's reply to Vergennes, in contrast, was a model of tact. It was, indeed, the note Adams should have written. He did not pretend to understand the matter himself, Franklin wrote (an admission of course that Adams would never have made, nor could have truthfully), but he agreed with the justice of the minister's argument that any hardship occasioned by the resolution should fall only on Americans and not on her allies. Indeed he was so confident that Congress would act justly in the matter that he did not feel that any representations on his part were necessary to persuade them. Moreover he assured Vergennes that the sentiments of Congress and of Americans in general toward the French alliance were very different from those expressed by Adams—that Congress and its constituents had a properly grateful view of the goodness and bounty of France and no disposition to talk of mutual benefits and equality.[9]

But Adams could not leave well enough alone. Having been rebuffed by Vergennes, he nonetheless wrote another long letter whose burden was that only by maintaining a superior fleet in American waters could the war be brought to a prompt conclusion. "The state of things in America," he noted, "has really become alarming, and this merely for want of a few French men-of-war upon that coast."

From the discussion of grand strategy, he went on to review the ties that bound the United States to France. "The United States of America are a great and powerful people, whatever European statesmen may think of them," he wrote. Only France, England, Austria and Russia exceeded her in numbers, strength and wealth. "Breaking off such a nation as this from the English so suddenly and uniting it so closely with France is one of the most extraordinary events that ever happened among mankind." This was the foundation that must be built upon.[10]

Three days later he addressed the French minister on the subject of his commission to negotiate peace with Great Britain. In February, he reminded Vergennes, he had solicited his advice about revealing the nature of his mission, especially his authority to negotiate a commercial treaty, and had been advised not to disclose it to the British. Adams, puzzled at this request, nonetheless had acquiesced. Now, six months later, he was still unaware of the reason he had been enjoined to silence, and he felt more strongly than ever that the best interest of his country and of France would be served by making his commissions known to the English government. "A frank and decent communication of my full powers," Adams wrote, would force England to come "to an explanation of their real intentions concerning America; for there, sir, lies the obstacle to peace."

This letter Vergennes chose for the moment to ignore. To Adams' plea for ships to be sent to American waters, he replied that a fleet had been dispatched and that Count de Rochambeau with a command of French soldiers had been sent to co-operate in combined land and naval operations with General Washington. "You will perceive, sir, by this detail that the King is far from abandoning the cause of America, and that His Majesty, without having been solicited by Congress, has taken strong measures to support the cause of America." These measures, he trusted, would be an effectual answer to those who were trying to "raise suspicions of France and to induce the Americans to take resolutions which will terminate in their slavery and dishonor." Adams was of course delighted with the news—"I assure Your Excellency that scarcely any news I ever heard gave me more satisfaction." But Vergennes had suggested that the measure was one of pure benevolence which was designed to save Congress from the effects of its own weakness and folly. This Adams could not pass by. The dispatch of the expedition, he assured Vergennes, would bring such spectacular advantages to France that the whole world would acclaim the King's wisdom in sending it.[11]

But to the query about announcing his mission to the British court, the answer was far less satisfactory. Vergennes was indeed peremptory: "I continue to be of the opinion that the time to communicate your plenipotentiary power to Lord Germain is not yet come." He had presented the arguments to support his position and had no doubt that Adams would agree but if he did not: "I pray you, and in the name of the King request you, to communicate your letter and my answer to the United States, and to suspend, until you shall receive orders from them, all measures with regard to the English ministry."[12]

Accompanying the letter was a detailed rebuttal of Adams' arguments for announcing his commission. The French minister felt that an announcement of his powers to conclude a commercial treaty were premature and might encourage England to make further efforts to detach America from the French alliance, and tempt the Americans in turn to aspire to a relationship which would be both natural and profitable. Adams replied at once. "Your Excellency's arguments or indeed your authority," he wrote, "will probably be sufficient to satisfy" those people in the United States who wished to see every possible measure taken to promote peace that was at the same time consistent with honor. He then went on to refute at length Vergennes's points, unaware of the fact that reasons of state rather than logic underlay the minister's position.[13]

Nor would he let the matter lie there. Vergennes had spoken of the fact "that the King, without being solicited by the Congress, had taken measures the most efficacious to sustain the American cause." The phrase annoyed Adams. He sat down once more to correct the statement and to show Vergennes that the King's actions were as beneficial to France as to America. It is hard to escape the conclusion that John suffered from being unoccupied, and was thus tempted to fish in the troubled waters of diplomacy where he had no license and could do more harm than good. Vergennes was not interested in his arguments and resented his prickly assertiveness. Adams had appointed himself adviser and admonisher, in a manner of speaking, to the King's minister; indeed he stated quite flatly: "I am determined to omit no opportunity of communicating my sentiments to Your Excellency upon everything that appears to me of importance to the common cause . . . and the communications shall be direct in person or by letter to Your Excellency, without the intervention of any third person. And I shall be very happy," he added, "and think myself highly honored, to give my poor advice to His Majesty's ministers upon anything that relates to the United States or the common cause whenever they shall be asked."[14]

This was the last straw for Vergennes. When he had taken it upon himself as a special mark of confidence to inform Adams of the dispatch of the French fleet and the forces under Rochambeau, he did not, he wrote acidly, "expect the animadversion which you have thought it your duty to make on a passage of my letter of the twentieth of this month. To avoid further discussion of that sort I think it my duty to inform you that Mr. Franklin being the sole person who has letters of credence to the King from the United States, it is with him only that I ought and can treat of matters which concern them." The passage to which Adams had so objected had no other purpose "than to convince you that the King did not stand in need of your solicitations to induce him to interest himself in the affairs of the United States."[15]

Vergennes wrote promptly to Franklin, enclosing his correspondence with Adams along with the suggestion that he make such use "of these pieces which your prudence shall suggest," and that he forward them to Congress so that "they may know the line of conduct which Mr. Adams pursues with regard to us, and that they may judge whether he is endowed, as Congress no doubt desires, with that conciliating spirit which is necessary for the important and delicate business with which he is entrusted."[16] Adams had placed in the hands of his enemy weapons which might be used most effectively against him; Vergennes wished to have Adams' instructions changed and his commission to negotiate the peace withdrawn.

Franklin forwarded the correspondence to Congress with his own comments. He was clearly embarrassed by Adams' exchange with Vergennes. That gentleman, he wrote, appeared much offended and had declared "that he would enter into no further discussions with Mr. Adams, nor answer any more of his letters." Having nothing to do, Franklin observed dryly, "he seems to have endeavored supplying what he may suppose my negotiations defective in." Adams had told Franklin, quite explicitly, that he thought "America has been too free in expressions of gratitude to France, for that she is more obliged to us than we to her, and that we should show spirit in our applications. I apprehend," Franklin added, "that he mistakes his ground, and that this court is to be treated with decency and delicacy." The King liked to think of himself as a benefactor of the United States. He wished to appear generous and bountiful and to be loved and appreciated by those who were, in his opinion, his beneficiaries. "I think it right," Franklin wrote, "to increase this pleasure by our thankful acknowledgments, and that such an expression of gratitude is not only our duty, but our interest." Adams, on the other hand, advocated "a little apparent stoutness and a greater air of independence and boldness in our demands."[17]

Vergennes, to make sure that Congress got the point, wrote Luzerne, "As to Dr. Franklin, his conduct leaves nothing for Congress to desire . . . and you may affirm with assurance . . . that the method he pursues is much more efficacious than it would be if he were to assume a tone of importunity in multiplying his demands, and above all in supporting them by menaces, to which we should neither give credence nor value, and which would only tend to render him personally disagreeable." Congress, to put it bluntly, must reply much more on French "good will than on the importunity of Dr. Franklin."[18]

Franklin wrote several months later to Adams informing him that he had been requested by Vergennes to forward the correspondence to Congress. "I was myself sorry to see those passages," Franklin noted. Since the ship carrying the dispatches had not left, perhaps Adams on further reflection might think it proper "to write something for effacing the impressions made by them."[19] But John stood fast.

XXXV

Rebuffed by Vergennes, Adams gave increasing attention to the Dutch situation. The Dutch were, he suspected, ripe to fall from the British tree and to conclude an alliance with the United States. Such help would, among other things, lessen the dependence of Congress on France, a dependence which seemed increasingly burdensome to the New Englander. Months passed but Henry Laurens, appointed minister to Holland, failed to appear, and Adams, unaware that Laurens had been captured by the British, fretted over his absence at what seemed to him a critical juncture in the affairs of the United Netherlands. If he could prevail upon Holland to offer material assistance to America, he would improve his country's bargaining position and make apparent to Vergennes that France was not the only resource of the United States. His position in Paris had, in fact, become impossible. A diplomatic scouting expedition to the north might reap very considerable benefits for the cause and would, in any event, remove him from an unpleasant situation.

So he set off for Amsterdam on the twenty-seventh of July with Charles and John Quincy. From Compiègne to Valenciennes to Brussels through the finest farming country that Adams had ever seen—through fields of wheat, rye, barley, oats, peas, beans, hemp, flax, grass, clover, lucerne, sainfoin. Great trees lined the way. "The vines, the cattle, the sheep, in short everything upon this road is beautiful and plentiful. Such immense fields and heavy crops of wheat I never saw anywhere," Adams noted.

At Brussels, John and the boys went to the cathedral, "more splendidly ornamented than any that I had seen, [and] hung with tapestry." One such tapestry Adams found most offensive; it depicted "a number of Jews stabbing the wafer, the *bon Dieu*, and blood gushing in streams from the bread. This insufferable piece of pious villany," Adams wrote, "shocked me beyond measure; but thousands were before it, on their knees, adoring. I could not help cursing the knavery of the priesthood and the brutal ignorance of the people; yet," he added, "perhaps I was rash and unreasonable, and that it is as much virtue and wisdom in them to adore as in me to detest and despise."

Adams dined with the little circle of Americans in Amsterdam—William Lee and his wife and children, Mrs. Izard, Jenings and his nephew—and walked along the canals, inspecting the town and visiting the Exchange, the churches, the statue of Erasmus and the other sights of the city.

Amsterdam seemed to Adams the ideal collecting station for European intelligence. "Some prudent person, authorized by Congress, is earnestly needed," he wrote Samuel Huntington. It was also an ideal spot from which to disseminate information throughout Europe. "And it may be depended on," he added, "that our cause has never suffered from anything more than from the failure of giving and receiving intelligence." A congressional representative could serve as "the center of communication between America and this and other parts of Europe." In addition such an agent might secure a loan.[1]

In Holland he found speculation rife. Everyone he encountered spoke as an oracle. "One says," he wrote Franklin, "America will give France the go-by. Another, that France and Spain will abandon America. A third, that Spain will forsake France and America. A fourth, that America has the interest of all Europe against her. A fifth, that she will become the greatest manufacturing country, and thus ruin Europe. A sixth, that she will become a great military and naval power, and will be very ambitious, and so terrible to Europe." This was Adams' dish. He refuted each prophecy with a parade of argument and logic, proving that the French alliance was the indispensable cornerstone of American policy and must remain so. He pointed out the dependence of Spain on France and assured those who feared America's industrial potential that the United States was an overwhelmingly rural nation that "would not make manufactures enough for her own consumption these thousand years." (He wrote Jean Luzac, professor at the University of Leyden, editor of the *Gazette de Leyde*, and a firm friend of the American cause: "The commerce of America can never increase but in a certain proportion to the growth of its agriculture until its whole territory of land is filled up with inhabitants, which will not be in some hundreds of years.") As for being a military threat, he vowed that "while we have land enough to conquer from the trees and rocks and wild beasts, we shall never go abroad to trouble other nations."[2]

Adams found the Dutch most congenial. Here were a people who were solid and comfortable, thrifty, industrious, moral and above all learned, with more collections, exhibitions and museums than all the rest of Europe. They were, to be sure, a little heavy, but their government was republican and their confederation was similar to that of the thirteen American states. Since nobody ever learned to speak Dutch but the Dutch themselves, they lived in a kind of cultural isolation among their larger neighbors, despised because of their small size. "I doubt much," John wrote Abigail, "whether there is any nation of Europe more estimable than the Dutch in proportion. Their industry and economy ought to be examples to the world," and in learning and the arts they also excelled. This was what America, on a larger scale, and with an agricultural rather than a commercial base, should become in time.[3]

He discovered, on the other hand, that the Dutch had a very vague idea of the character or the principles of the American Revolution. They considered it "as a desultory rage of a few enthusiasts, without order, discipline, law or government." He found there so much ignorance of "the strength, resources, commerce and constitution of America . . . so false and exaggerated an imagination of the power of England . . . so many doubts of our final success . . . so many jealousies that France and Spain will abandon us or that we shall abandon them; so many fears of offending the English ministry . . . and, above all, the Stadtholder and his friends, that even a loan of money will meet with every obstruction and discouragement possible." The immediate need was a minister plenipotentiary who, by the indefatigible dissemination of accurate information about the United States, could "lead the public opinion into the truth."[4]

Adams took a quick tour from Brussels to Antwerp, Rotterdam, Delft, The Hague, Leyden and Amsterdam. Everywhere he met friends of the American cause and was royally entertained. He immediately began sending material, starting with the Massachusetts constitution, to Luzac for publication in that journal. He was especially pleased to hear that his native state had established, according to the provision in the Massachusetts constitution which he had drafted, an Academy of Arts and Sciences. This, with the revival of the American Philosophical Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge to be held at Philadelphia, promised well for all branches of philosophy and art in the new nation. Writing to Charles Dumas, Adams suggested that correspondence be opened between these fledging institutions and their older European counterparts. "Would it be unworthy of any academy in Europe to send these infant societies a set of their printed memoirs of transactions? Science and literature are of no party nor nation," he added, "they belong to the great commonwealth of mankind." The American societies should start botanical gardens, "and collections of the birds, beasts and fishes as well as trees and plants which are peculiar to that country in order to [prepare] a natural history of it—an ample field this."[5]

It also occurred to him that the United States should take a direct interest in developing the study of the English language. Eloquence was of special importance in a republic, as indeed were all methods of communication between the government and the people. In a republic, the interest and support of the populace must be enlisted to carry through the government's program. They must have matters of policy explained to them; they must be challenged and aroused. It was perhaps for this reason that republics had "produced the greatest purity, copiousness and perfection of language; and language, in its turn, influences not only the form of government, but the temper, the sentiments and manners of the people." The example of "those two ancient towns, Athens and Rome, would be sufficient, without any other argument, to show the United States the importance to their liberty, prosperity and glory of an early attention to the subject of eloquence and language. . . . The honor of forming the first public institution for refining, correcting, improving and ascertaining the English language I hope is reserved for Congress; they have every motive that can possibly influence a public assembly to undertake it. . . . The constitutions of all the states in the Union are so democratical," he continued, "that eloquence will become the instrument for recommending men to their fellow citizens and the principal means of advancement through the various ranks and offices of society." English, he pointed out, was destined to be, "in the next and succeeding centuries, more generally the language of the world than Latin was in the last or French is in the present age." This would be brought about, willy-nilly, because of the increasing population of America "and their universal connection and correspondence with all nations."[6]

Meanwhile he grew increasingly skeptical of the prospects of peace. When David Hartley, Franklin's English friend, wrote sounding him out on his commission, Adams answered that he saw "no prospect at all of ever acting in virtue of it." While it was certainly true that the war would not last forever, it would "probably last long enough to wear you and me out, and to make room for our sons or grandsons to become the blessed peacemakers. . . . So the fates have ordained, and we mortals must submit."[7] He wrote in much the same vein to Congress and to Abigail. The only thing that would bring peace would be a decisive victory on the field of battle or on the high seas.

To Dr. Samuel Cooper, Adams wished himself at home. "Peace will not be made these twenty years, in my deliberate opinion. Our unthinking countrymen never from the beginning," he wrote, "appeared to me to be sufficiently sensible of the difficulty and danger of the work they were about. . . . Many think that they have only to propose peace, and there will be peace, only ask for accommodation, and they shall have it. . . . They seem to think the English still their friends. . . . There is not in England one half the malice and rancor against Frenchmen and Spaniards that there is against Americans. The King and ministry have found means and had the art to inspire even the populace with a hatred of us, as bitter as that of the common soldiers who are employed to butcher us in America. The mob themselves would pull the ministry to pieces, if they were to make peace with us. . . . If there is ever any affection again between Americans and Britons it will be miraculous indeed."

At one of the dinners in his honor given by a Dutch capitalist, Adams met a Mr. Calkoen, the leading lawyer of Amsterdam, who asked him a number of questions about American affairs. Even with the assistance of one of the company who acted as interpreter, Adams found it tedious and frustrating to try answering the questions directed to him. Observing Adams' struggles, Calkoen asked if he might submit his questions in writing. Adams readily agreed and devoted a letter to each of the twenty-six questions the Dutch lawyer asked. He prefaced his replies with the observation that "to give a stranger an adequate idea of the rise and progress of the dispute between Great Britain and America would require much time and many volumes; it comprises the history of England and the United States of America for twenty years; that of France and Spain for five or six; and that of all the maritime powers of Europe for two or three."

Immediately after the conquest of Canada from the French in the year 1759, "Great Britain," by Adams' account, "seemed to be seized with a jealousy against the colonies. . . . From this moment every measure of the British court and Parliament . . . confirmed [the colonists] in an opinion of a settled design to overturn those constitutions under which their ancestors had emigrated from the Old World, and with infinite toil, danger and expense, planted a new one."

Adams, writing almost a letter a day, proceeded to show that there were few Tories in America; that the country daily grew in strength; that its people could sustain their effort indefinitely although abandoned by France and Spain; that the confederation was a solid one that would not be readily shattered by the revolt of particular states, and a dozen other answers intended to reassure Calkoen and the Dutch in general of America's ability and determination to persevere in their fight for independence.

To the question of whether the defection of one great American leader would destroy the cause, Adams replied: "We are all equal in America, in a political view, and as much alike as Lycurgus' haycocks. All public offices and employments are bestowed by the free choice of the people, and at present, through the whole continent, are in the hands of those gentlemen who have distinguished themselves the most by their counsels, exertions and sufferings in the contest with Great Britain. If there ever was a war that could be called *the people's war*, it is this of America against Great Britain; it having been determined on by the people, and pursued by the people in every step of its progress. . . . The American cause stands upon the essential, unalterable character of the whole body of the people; upon their prejudices, passions, habits and principles, which they derived from their ancestors."

Most of Calkoen's questions were directed at the problem of American finances. Adams, aware that the proper answers would help to create an atmosphere favorable to a loan, put the best case he could for America's resources, assuring the Dutchman that the United States could and would pay all charges incurred in waging the war, including, by implication, any forthcoming Dutch loans.

Calkoen, much impressed by Adams' answers to his queries, became a convert to the American side. He read the letters to "a society of gentlemen of letters" and so began, as Adams had hoped, to spread Congress' case among prominent citizens of the city. Even before the letters were circulated, Adams got nibbles. The House of Van Staphorst sought an introduction to Adams and the Baron Van der Capellen wrote to say that a relative of his wished to invest twenty thousand florins in American funds and to recommend an agent in Rotterdam who might be of service to him.[8]

Even while Adams urged Congress to appoint someone to take Henry Laurens' place in Holland and hinted at his own availability, word was on the way that Congress had appointed him to fill the post of the Carolinian. On the seventeenth of September, James Searle, a member of Congress from Philadelphia, arrived in Amsterdam with dispatches from Congress informing Adams of his additional assignment as interim congressional representative to Holland. The very next day he set about discharging his new duties, riding around and consulting Dutchmen whom he knew to be sympathetic to the American cause, making suggestions for drawing that country into an alliance with the United States and feeling out the possibilities of negotiating a loan from Dutch capitalists. He was warned that he might find money harder to come by than he imagined and some of his Dutch friends expressed surprise that Congress had not commissioned him to try to conclude a treaty of alliance and commerce. The States-General would certainly have received him in friendly spirit. Adams was pleased at the response to his commission and there was further encouragement in word from Franklin that the King of Spain had offered to be security for a Dutch loan and to pay interest on a sum of $150,000. The news came to Adams "as cold water to a thirsty soul," and drove him to redoubled efforts to raise money.

But his hopes were short-lived. The publication of dispatches taken when Laurens was captured revealed an effort by a group of Amsterdam merchants to promote an alliance between the United States and Holland and the resultant clamor, combined with the success of British arms, frightened off prospective lenders. The issue of whether or not Holland would join the armed neutrality also hung in the balance and further complicated matters. Adams wrote Franklin that "This republic is in a violent crisis," adding, "if a certain party prevails, we shall raise no money here; if they do not, we shall raise very little. Patience is recommended to me and delay in hopes of a turn of affairs. I am advised to do nothing, to attempt nothing, not even to choose a house, at present."[9] He wrote to

Congress that he saw "every day more and more of the inveterate prejudices of this nation in favor of the English and against the French; more and more of the irresistible influence of the Stadtholder, and more and more of the irresolution, uncertainty and confusion of the nation. . . . One thing . . . is certain, that Congress can depend upon no money from hence."[10]

John's enchantment with the Dutch was, in consequence, brief. By December he was writing to William Temple Franklin commiserating with his grandfather's attack of gout and observing, "I could wish for the gout too, or anything else, to make the scene agreeable to me, who in this capital of the reign of Mammon cannot find the air of Passy or the amusement of Paris." He was still impressed by the "industry, simplicity and economy" of the Dutch, but he realized that these virtues by themselves were not enough to make a great nation. They must be raised to a higher common denominator by "public spirit. But here," he added, "these are only private virtues and begin and end in self." As such they were, he discovered, often petty and mean rather than the noble foundations of enlightened popular government. Even classic virtues, he noted, could become vices if the tie between public and private action was severed, and to James Warren he complained: "Such a nation of idolaters at the shrine of Mammon never existed, I believe, before. The English are as great idolators, but they have more gods than one."

"This country," he wrote Congress, "is indeed in a melancholy situation, sunk in ease, devoted to the pursuits of gain, overshadowed on all sides by more powerful neighbors, unanimated by love of military glory or any aspiring spirit, feeling little enthusiasm for the public, terrified at the loss of an old friend, equally terrified at the prospect of being obliged to form connections with a new one; encumbered with a complicated and perplexed constitution, divided among themselves in interest and sentiment."[11]

The hospitality which Adams had encountered at first gave way to a marked reserve caused by timidity and by uncertainty as to which way the current of events would run. Adams wrote Jay, "I have been in the most curious country, among the most incomprehensible people, and under the most singular constitution of government in the world"; and he complained to Abigail of the "general littleness" that was a result of the Dutch attention to every fraction of a cent. "Frugality and industry are virtues everywhere, but avarice and stinginess are not frugality." The Dutch were convinced that the way to success as a merchant and trader lay only in such concentration upon "stivers and duits," but Adams "would never wish to see a son of mine govern himself by it." New Englander though he was, he felt that to become rich by such means was to impoverish the soul. Riches were a goal, he wrote Abigail, "that I hope none of my children will ever aim at." The thought led him on to further reflections on his favorite subject, independence: "I would have my children attend to duits and farthings as devoutly as the merest Dutchman upon earth, if such attention was necessary to support their independence," he noted. "A man who discovers a disposition and a design to be independent seldom succeeds. A jealousy arises against him. The tyrants are alarmed on one side lest he should oppose them. The slaves are alarmed on the other lest he should oppose their servility. The cry from all quarters is, 'He is the proudest man in the world. He cannot bear to be under obligation.' I never in my life observed anyone endeavoring to lay me under obligations to him but I suspected he had a design to make me his dependent and to have claims upon my gratitude. This I should have no objection to, because gratitude is always in one's power. But the danger is that men will expect and require more of us than honor and innocence and rectitude will permit us to perform."[12]

The truth was that Adams was witnessing, if not the death throes of the Dutch, at least their precipitous decline as an important European power. It was a curious and disheartening spectacle. The Dutch were the people of Europe whose political forms and social structure approached most nearly that of the American states. They had won their independence from Spain in a struggle that, to Adams' mind, was very like that in which the United States were presently engaged. They had formed a confederated republic, established a central parliament with a hereditary chief executive, the Stadtholder. In practice the rivalry of the provinces for commercial advantages and the factions that adhered to the Stadtholder or opposed him made the nation almost impotent in a crisis. Holland was at the beginning of its times of troubles, a period of national agony that would last for twenty years or more and from which the country would never fully recover.

While Adams conducted his frustrating negotiations in Holland he sent John Quincy and Charles with John Thaxter to Leyden to continue their study of Greek and Latin with a tutor in preparation for admission to the university, "there to attend lectures of the celebrated professors." Not only was the university one of the best in Europe, but "the air," he assured Abigail, "is infinitely purer, and the company and conversation are better" than in Paris. He was unwilling to have the children taught in the Dutch common schools, "where a littleness of soul is notorious. The masters are mean-spirited wretches, pinching, kicking and boxing the children upon every turn."[13]

At the same time Adams kept up his contacts with those Dutchmen who were inclined toward the American side. He assured Baron Van der Capellen that the "little alarms and jealousies of merchants or of nations are not much to be regarded. The American question, one of the greatest that was ever decided among men . . . will be determined by the cabinets of Europe according to great national interests. But let these decide as they will, America will be independent. It is not in the power of Europe to prevent it. . . . American independence is no longer a question with one man of sense in the world who understands anything of the subject." Let the Dutch merchants follow their shortsighted policies of toadying to the British. "Let them go on lending their money and hiring their ships to England to enable her to murder people of whom neither the lender or the borrower is worthy. Time will show how much wisdom there is in their unfeeling sacrifice of every sentiment and every principle upon the altar of Mammon. The less America has to do with such people the better it will be for her."[14]

In his effort to assess the temper of the Dutch, Adams gave his attention to their popular literature—"the poets and orators are generally considered as the surest repositories of popular ideas." The clergy, likewise, gave voice to public sentiments "both in their sermons and their prayers," and Adams visited as many different churches as he could to read this barometer of public opinion and noted gloomily that the pastors invoked divine aid for Great Britain against her enemies. As the contention with England over the Anglo-Dutch treaty reached a climax, the nobles allied with the Stadtholder found themselves at war with the middle-class merchants and the burgomasters. The streets of Amsterdam were plastered with flyers denouncing one party or the other; anti-English songs were hawked and sung; one woman, Adams wrote Congress, sold six hundred copies of the verse in an hour. "Sir Joseph will kick and cuff and pinch this people until he forces into them a little spunk," he wrote Jenings.[15]

Adams was systematic and indefatigable in cultivating individuals and groups favorable to the American cause. He made his way among lawyers, bankers, merchants and, where he could, parliamentarians of the various provinces, more especially that of Holland itself. His close friendship with two newspaper editors, M. Jean Luzac, editor of the *Gazette de Leyden*, and Monsieur Cerisier, editor of the *Politique Hollandais* and the *French Gazette* of Amsterdam, made the columns of their papers available to him and he fed them constant streams of articles, reports, letters and documents designed to present the United States' position and prospects in the most favorable light.

In addition he devoted considerable labor to making up what he entitled "a catalogue of a number of names in Holland with their reputed political characters." First he listed pro-British merchants, then those who were neutral, and finally the pro-American merchants. One group of "burgomasters, etc.," of Amsterdam were listed as Whigs. Then followed a list of the "principal Whigs in prov. of Overyssel, including some who are listed as hereditary nobles who form part of the legislative in the Sts Genl." Following was a list of American sympathizers by city: "Tushink of the Burgoms of the city of Zwoll; Van Zuchtelen, Burgoms of the city of Derwenter." The same procedure was followed for the province of Gelderland where the two Barons Van der Capellen headed the list, and for Groningen and the other provinces of the Netherlands. Adams used the list, compiled with the help of Charles Dumas, in his travels around Holland, making a special point to seek out those individuals listed as friends of America or as neutrals, to solicit their advice and support.

Another list contained the names "of some individuals in Holland who (among many others) will lend money to the United States," and still a third document was a detailed description of the provinces and cities of the United Netherlands—their principal institutions, "the banks, universities, trade unions, etc." This was a labor that cost Adams many hours of research and many conversations with Dutch friends. Every province and every city had its own particular constitution and form of government, a curious hotchpotch of feudal survivals and more modern reforms. Each little political entity jealously guarded its own unique and often hopelessly archaic practices.

On the twentieth of December 1780, Great Britain declared that a state of warfare existed between that country and Holland, and the situation, from Adams' point of view, took a decided turn for the better. Ministers in the English-speaking churches were forced by their congregations to stop praying for the King of England. The actors at the theater addressed the audience directly and exhorted it not to become enslaved. In Adams' words, "the presses swarm with pamphlets, handbills, songs and poems, generally much against the English, and commonly with some favorable hints concerning the Americans." Where he had before seen sloth and indifference, Adams now observed "a tremendous spirit in the body of the people," yet Great Britain might still do a great deal to divide and demoralize the Dutch, Adams warned. "The confusion is yet so great," he wrote Congress, "that I have no hopes at present of obtaining money. There must be time for the fermentation to go off; and the quarrel with England must become in the minds of all irreconcilable before we can try the experiment whether we have any credit or not."[16]

He was untiring in his own efforts. It was the proper role of the diplomat, he explained to Dumas, to prepare men's minds for the decisive moment. "It is very true," he wrote, "there are critical moments, after which things go of themselves, but it is necessary to prepare things for a crisis, that everything may be ready when it arrives." Diplomats were like midwives. Events moved in their own good time. The diplomat and the midwife could do little to hasten or delay the decisive moment, but they could, indeed it was their responsibility to, make the birth an easy and successful one, "to avoid fatal dangers. The whole diplomatic corps," he wrote, "with all their superb pomp, are but a company of grannys."

To better take the pulse of popular sentiment toward England and America, Adams set off shortly after the turn of the year on a jaunt through the principal cities of the province of Holland—Leyden, Haarlem, The Hague and Rotterdam. While he found much anti-British feeling he noted also much uncertainty and demoralization. British ships had immediately wreaked such havoc on Dutch shipping that many merchants joined the English creditors in urging peace. Completing his tour, Adams concluded: "It will be long before the Dutch can do any great things, and they must suffer very severely."[17]

At Leyden, Adams went to his son's classes in Latin and Greek. He found their perceptor, Wensing, a learned man. "He obliges his pupils to be industrious," he noted, "and they have both made great progress . . . he is pleased with them and they with him." John Quincy was transcribing a Greek grammar and a treatise on Roman antiquities and ten-year-old Charles was working his way through a Latin grammar. At Leyden, John met Benjamin Waterhouse, the American scientist, and Waterhouse, Adams and John Thaxter dined together at the Cour de Hollande and then went to the university to matriculate the two boys.

Charles, it turned out, was too young. Twelve was the minimum age for admission. But John Quincy, after swearing solemnly that he would do nothing against the laws of the university, city or land, was accepted, and his father busied himself finding out all he could about the institution—its regulations, the number of professors, their characters, the student government, the supervision of the students' morals and studies, their manner of living and all other information that he could unearth.

When Adams arrived back in Amsterdam he found things still very much up in the air. The state of Zeeland, most vulnerable of the provinces and most thoroughly committed to the Stadtholder, continued to oppose war and to distract the common councils. Adams was restless and impatient. He decided to press Amsterdam itself for an expression of its intent to ally with the United States and France or remain neutral. He used Dumas at The Hague to try to establish contact with Dutch leaders in order to sound out the possibilities of an alliance between Holland and America. He wrote a long letter to Baron Van der Capellen tot den Pol, of Overyssel, explaining that America's situation was not as desperate as it seemed to the Baron and assuring him that the United States would triumph. "My mind," he wrote, "has a long habit of looking forward and guessing what future events will be the consequence of those that are passed, and although we are very shortsighted, yet we can sometimes reason upon some principles and prophesy with a good degree of certainty." It seemed to Adams that the armed neutrality must eventually produce a state of war between the neutral powers and England, and England, after some initial successes, would in the end be ruined "and undergo a terrible convulsion."

The Dutch deluded themselves with the hope that when England saw "the neutral union going to war with her she will give up, beg pardon, change the ministry, make peace, rise in arms against the ministry, etc., etc., etc. Alas!" Adams wrote, "there will be no such thing. There must fly a good many cannon balls first. I should have thought this cool, penetrating nation more intimately acquainted with the English heart. . . . Nine in ten of that whole people fully and firmly believe themselves able to fight and beat all the maritime powers of the world." Nothing but military and naval action, "taking their fleets of merchant ships and burning, sinking or destroying their men-of-war will bring them to reason." Any other expectation was delusive.[18]

To Dana he exulted in the reports from America and deplored the "croakers" and "grumbletonians" who warned of the condition of the army and complained of the lack of pay for the soldiers and the inadequate clothing and equipment. He was glad to hear that Cornwallis was operating in northeastern Virginia. "The Chesapeake Bay," he wrote James Searle, "is a fine trap. Our allies will help us catch a grand flock of vultures there by and by. I suspect they will soon all fly there and to Charlestown from New York."[19]

On February 25, Adams finally received from Congress a commission giving him full powers to negotiate a treaty with their high mightinesses, the States-General of the United Provinces, and promptly wrote to the Duke de la Vauguyon that the friendliness of the province of Friesland suggested it was the time to push hard for a treaty of alliance between the United States, the Netherlands and France. "Friesland," he wrote the Duke, "has taken so decided a part, and the other provinces, especially Holland, are animated with such a spirit, that I cannot but flatter myself such a proposition would run with rapidity through the seven provinces, and contribute very much to accelerate the period of this bloody and ruinous war."[20]

But on further reflection Adams decided that it would be more prudent, for the moment at least, to withhold his commission to negotiate a treaty of amity and commerce. As he wrote Congress, there was a "perfect chaos of sentiments and systems, principles and interests" at work in the provinces. There was a daily threat of "seditions and commotions among the people" which was only suppressed by the presence of soldiers at strategic points, but whether the mobs would rise "in favor of war or against it; in favor of England or against it; in favor of the Prince or the city of Amsterdam; in favor of America or against it," no one dared to guess. In spite of the uncertainty and confusion Adams had undertaken to open negotiations for a loan, but he dared not go further for fear of playing into the hands of the pro-British faction.

Adams' preliminary efforts toward securing a loan were directed to Messrs. Jean de Neufville and Sons, but Neufville tried to take advantage, in Adams' opinion of Congress' needs and the general tightness of money in Europe to charge an excessive rate of interest. He rebuked them sharply. Although his own reputation was involved in the success of securing a loan, he would not hesitate to abandon his mission and recommend that Congress depend exclusively on Paris and Madrid. "I am not therefore anxious, nor will I depart a single doit from the terms, if the whole falls through," he wrote, adding, "I have already gone further than will be for the good of my reputation, or promote the intercourse between the two countries."[21]

Now the official if unrecognized minister plenipotentiary of Congress to the Netherlands, Adams undertook to secure a house "to receive and entertain company . . . decent enough for any character in Europe to dine in with a republican citizen." He commissioned agents to rent him a house—"large, roomy and handsome"—at any price below three thousand guilders a year and furnish it, initially, with the necessary kitchen equipment and four beds "suitable for gentlemen to lodge in and two, at least, suitable for servants." He must have "chairs and tables for one large room to receive company, and chairs and tables for another room to do business." He would want "a prudent, skillful manservant to take care of the house, kitchen and cellar," as well as "a good cook, male or female . . . and two manservants," one a footman, and "a genteel carriage . . . with suitable horses and coachman." For the servants there should be liveries of "deep blue cloth with a scarlet edging on the coat and scarlet waistcoats, scarlet cuffs."[22]

Congress, meanwhile, proceeded to draw bills on Adams in Amsterdam without waiting to learn whether he had been successful in negotiating loans and the protested bills had to be passed on to Franklin, who had secured an additional six million livres from the King, for payment. "It is a most grievous mortification to me to find that America has no credit here," he wrote Franklin, "while England certainly still has so much, and to find that no gentlemen in public life here dare return me a visit or answer me a letter."[23] The army and "every civil officer in public trust" were rumored to be pro-British and anti-American. Adams despaired of fathoming the temper of the country. "The councils of this people," he wrote Congress, "are the most inscrutable of any I ever saw."[24]

Adams' frustration broke out in another letter to Franklin, denouncing Spain's ungenerous behavior in refusing to recognize American independence or to grant a sizable loan to Congress. "God forgive them," he wrote, "and enable America to forget their ungenerosity. . . . By heaven, I would make a bargain with all Europe if it lay with me. Let all Europe stand still, neither lend men nor money nor ships to England nor America, and let them fight it out alone. I would give my share of millions for such a bargain. America is treated unfairly and ungenerously by Europe. But thus it is; mankind will be servile to tyrannical masters and basely devoted to vile idols."[25]

On the nineteenth of April, Adams addressed a memorial to the States-General announcing his powers "to confer with your high mightinesses concerning a treaty of amity and commerce," and assuring the Dutch legislature of the determination of America to achieve its independence at all costs. From this he went on to argue that the two countries were, by similarity of institutions, temper and history, natural allies. "America in general, until her relations were formed with the house of Bourbon, has ever considered this nation as her first friend in Europe, whose history and the great characters it exhibits in the various arts of peace, as well as achievements in war by sea and land, have been particularly studied, admired and imitated in every state." In religion, in forms of government, "in general usages and in the liberality of sentiments in those momentous points of freedom of inquiry, the right of private judgment and the liberty of conscience, of so much importance to be supported in the world and imparted to all mankind . . . the two nations resemble each other more than any other," he wrote.

They were so alike in their origins that "every Dutchman instructed in the subject must pronounce the American Revolution just and necessary, or pass a censure upon the greatest actions of his immortal ancestors." In addition the commercial interests of the two nations coincided, making a union "so obviously natural that there has seldom been a more distinct designation of Providence to any two distinct nations to unite them together."

Adams tried to present his memorial, carefully translated into Dutch by Dumas, to Pieter Van Bleiswyck, the Grand Pensionary. But although that gentleman received Adams politely, he refused to accept the document, saying that he had no power to do so and that acceptance must come from the States-General itself. He referred Adams to the Baron Lynden van Hemmen, President of the States-General. To the Baron's refusal to accept the memorial, Adams replied that he must then publish it so that the world as well as the States-General might be informed. The Baron's answer was a sly smile of assent. With the memorial published, the President could place it before the States-General without seeming to endorse it. Many of the deputies would doubtless respond by requesting copies in order to distribute them to the various provinces where the memorial might be debated in the provincial assemblies.

From the Pensionary's, Adams and Dumas went to wait upon the Prince of Orange and present him with a letter announcing Adams' commission as minister plenipotentiary and requesting an audience. The letter was an obvious embarrasment to the Prince. Adams was advised to return to his hotel and the Prince hurried off to confer with the officers of the States-General. After some two hours Adams was summoned to the office of the Prince's secretary and told that the Stadtholder could not accept the letter until their high mightinesses, the States-General, had decided whether or not to receive Adams in the character of minister plenipotentiary to the United Provinces.

Adams passed the memorial on to Dumas who arranged to have it published in Dutch, French, and English and distributed throughout the Netherlands. It appeared promptly in Dutch and French newspaper and, according to Dumas, pleased the great majority of those who read it. Although it did not obtain and, as Adams himself confessed, "probably will not obtain for a long time an acknowledgment of American independence . . . it . . . discovered with absolute certainty the sentiments of the nation," and these were warmly in favor of the American cause.

Close on the publication Adams sent letters to the Grand Pensionary and the Prince of Orange, enclosing copies of the finally ratified Articles of Confederation. The Pensionary and the Prince both opened and read and then returned the letters to Dumas, who was acting as Adams' agent. The Prince was especially apologetic. To accept any communication from the American minister before the States-General had formally received him would be to seem to act over the heads of their high mightinesses.

While matters dragged on from day to day, a further hitch developed. Word reached Leyden that the Russian court had made an agreement with the Emperor of Prussia to hold a congress at Vienna to negotiate a general peace between the belligerent powers. This was a blow to Adams. Seized at eagerly by the Dutch peace party, it provided an excuse to delay recognition of American independence and aroused false hopes of an early end to hostilities.

The weeks passed with petitions, memorials and resolutions fired off by the various provincial assemblies to the Stadtholder, to each other, to the States-General—that and very little else—charges and countercharges, exhortations and declarations, while British ships continued to wreak havoc with Dutch merchantmen.

Adams' renewed efforts to open a loan were unsuccessful. Four banking houses controlled all loans—"a phalanx formed by British ministry, Dutch court, proprietors of English stocks, and great mercantile houses in the interests of the British ministry." It seemed more certain than ever that a treaty must precede the loan. However desperate Congress' need for funds, the wheels of Dutch policy must grind their slow, laborious way and Adams must chafe and fret. The King of France had secured a personal loan of five million livres from Holland and this would have to suffice for the time.

Vergennes, for his own reasons, summoned Adams in early summer from Amsterdam; Adams journeyed to Versailles and sent word to the minister that he was available whenever he wished to see him. Vergennes's secretary, Rayneval, informed Adams that the Count could not see him at once but that the prospect of negotiations for peace had made it imperative that Adams and Vergennes "have some consultations at leisure

. . . that we might understand each other's views." Several days later Adams went to his conference with the French minister. The subject was the articles of peace proposed by the courts of Russia and Germany. Spain had already prepared her answers; those of France were nearly ready. The two main points contained in the articles of negotiation were that Great Britain and America were to carry on their own separate negotiations for peace without the intervention of any of the other belligerent powers, although the actual peace treaties could only be signed conjointly. In order to allow time for the negotiators to reach agreement, there was to be a truce of a year. At the conclusion of the meeting Adams went back to Amsterdam to draft his reply, determined at all costs not to agree to the truce. Moreover, he was convinced that it would be a grave error to accept the mediation of the imperial courts until they had acknowledged the independence of the United States.

He would, Adams assured Vergennes, cheerfully accept the instructions of Congress, confident that that body would uphold the "character and dignity" of the United States. He wrote a mild enough letter, giving his reflections on the proposed articles but offering to change or correct anything that the minister found "exceptionable." Three days later he wrote to endorse more fully the first article—the proposal that England and the United States be left to negotiate a separate treaty. It would allow Great Britain to appear to grant independence from its own beneficence rather than from pressure by France and Spain. This would also avoid the problem of deciding prior to the negotiations in just what character America should appear at the conference table and would remove the issue of how the mediating powers should treat the American states "in order to remove every embarrassment, therefore," he wrote, ". . . if Your Excellency should be of the same opinion, and advise me to it, I would withdraw every objection to the congress [of imperial powers] on the part of the United States, and decline nothing but the *status quo* and the armistice."[26]

Vergennes replied evasively to Adams' letter. It was too early in the negotiations to talk very specifically. Adams had no official status and thus could not participate directly—a warning that he must rely on the good offices of the French minister. John answered with patience and restraint. He had scant hopes for the success of the negotiation, he confessed. Left to his own wishes, he would prefer to avoid the peace conference entirely. He understood that the imperial courts had proposed that there should be an American representative at Vienna. This seemed desirable to Adams since it was tacit acknowledgment that America existed as a belligerent power. On the other hand, the imperial powers had extended no invitation to Congress to send a representative and without such an invitation it was impossible for Adams or anyone else to attend. All this was well enough, but Adams could not forbear to go just a little further and include one of those homilies that the Frenchman found so offensive. "The dignity of North America," he wrote, "does not consist in diplomatic ceremonials or any of the subtleties of etiquette; it consists solely in reason, justice, truth, the rights of mankind and the interests of the nations of Europe. . . . I shall, therefore, never make unnecessary difficulties on the score of etiquette, and shall never insist upon anything of this sort which Your Excellency or some other minister of our allies does not advise me to as indispensable."[27]

Then he thought the matter over for another day and concluded that he must be recognized at any peace conference in his full powers as minister plenipotentiary of the United States or go home, and he wrote to Vergennes at considerable length to explain the logic by which he had arrived at this conclusion. The disturbing thought had occurred to Adams that the mediating powers might not have entirely accepted the idea of American independence. The reference in the first article to separate negotiations between Great Britain and her "American colonies" put his teeth on edge. "The United States," he declared primly, "have assumed their equal station among the nations. They have assumed a sovereignty which they acknowledge to hold only from God and their own swords." Was it possible that the imperial courts were so deluded as to think that American independence was a matter of negotiation rather than the precondition of negotiation? It was indeed, though Adams had no hint of it.

Catherine the Great had no sympathy with the upstart colonies and was quite prepared to throw America as a sop to Great Britain in order to bring about a general European peace. It would have been surprising if it had not been so. Adams' suspicions were thus well founded, but to Vergennes they were another instance of his contentious, meddlesome temper. Must he always get dissertations on the law of nations from this rural lawyer turned diplomat and be lectured to on the glories of the United States if he gave the slightest pretext for a correspondence? Yet he suppressed his irritation. Confident that Luzerne on Vergennes's orders was sapping the roots of Adams' authority in Philadelphia, the Count could be patient with the presumptuous American a little longer. But a sigh must have escaped him as he received the third communication from Adams in as many days, a letter beginning, "Since my letter of the nineteenth another point has occurred to me, upon which it seems necessary that I should say something to Your Excellency."[28]

What Adams at this time would hardly have guessed was that there was evidence that Vergennes was determined to encourage the mediation of the imperial courts as a way of freeing France from its obligation to support American independence. In February 1781 the French minister wrote himself a memorandum. "One may . . . presume to say that the King would be lacking in delicacy, that he would be somewhat violating his engagements, that he would be giving the Americans just cause for complaint or at least distrust, if he should propose to Congress to sign a truce leaving the English what they possess on the continent" (which included among other bits of real estate the seaport cities of New York, Charleston and Savannah, Maine, the Great Lakes country and the far Northwest). "Only the mediators, bound by no such ties, could make a proposition so painful to the United States."

There remains some weight of evidence therefore to suggest that Vergennes at least considered the possibility of selling short his American ally. His constant efforts to have Congress replace Adams or whittle away his powers were not by any means based solely on his personal dislike of the New Englander. It was a campaign intended to clear the way for whatever kind of a negotiated peace seemed best suited to the interests of France.

While Adams debated with Vergennes the advisability of a European congress to negotiate peace, Luzerne, in Philadelphia, met with a special committee of Congress. He spoke bluntly enough to the committee. His Majesty took a dim view of Mr. Dana's commission as minister plenipotentiary to Catherine the Great. As for Mr. Adams, while conceding his patriotism and his ardor, Congress, Luzerne told the committee, must surely see the necessity of setting clear limits to his powers. If that body had confidence in the friendship and benevolence of the King, the delegates must at the same time be aware that a perfect accord between the French ministers and the representatives of Congress was necessary in the extremely delicate matter of treaty making. Congress, therefore, should direct Adams "to take no step without the approbation of His Majesty." In short, they must order him "to receive his instructions from the Count de Vergennes." This was the more important, Luzerne suggested suavely, because Congress was completely dependent on the good offices of the King in dealing with nations that did not acknowledge American independence. The King would naturally support the ministers of Congress where he could; it was therefore essential that no agent of Congress "by aiming at impossible things, forming exorbitant demands . . . or perhaps by misconstruing his instructions" should drive a wedge between the allies. The plea, or perhaps more properly the demand, was an astute mixture of firmness and cajolery made against the background of the Congress' desperate need for French assistance. Luzerne added smoothly that "it was always to be taken for granted that the most perfect independency is to be the foundation of the instructions to be given to Mr. Adams," adding a final cautionary word: the new instructions must be sent off to Mr. Adams "with all possible dispatch." Furthermore Congress should instruct its mediators to present its demands, except for independence, "with the greatest moderation and reserve," so that there should be no unnecessary obstacles to the speedy conclusion of a peace when the time came for serious negotiation.

What Luzerne was asking, in essence, was that Congress place its negotiations in the hands of Vergennes, at least as far as Adams was concerned. Congress, on report of the committee, authorized Adams to concur in the efforts of the Emperors of Russia and Germany to mediate between the warring powers, allowed him some latitude in setting the northern and western boundaries of the states, and enjoined "the most candid and confidential communications upon all subjects to the ministers of our generous ally, the King of France." He was to undertake nothing "without their knowledge and concurrence." This would perhaps be strong enough to satisfy Vergennes and yet leave Adams some freedom of action.

But Congress did not stop there. At the conclusion of a rancorous debate upon the committee's report, Adams' powers were further circumscribed. In the Journals of Congress was recorded the resolution: "that the committee appointed to confer with the minister of France communicate confidentially to him the substance of the foregoing instructions . . . that they also revise the instructions given to the minister plenipotentiary respecting a treaty of commerce with Great Britain."

Also after "knowledge and concurrence" in the original report had been added the words, "ultimately to govern yourself by their advice and opinion, endeavoring in your whole conduct to make them sensible how much we rely upon His Majesty's influence for the effectual support in everything that may be necessary for the present security or future prosperity of the United States of America." On the question to insert the amending clause, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut voted "no" unanimously, Pennsylvania was divided, New York absent, and all the states from Maryland south were unanimous in voting "ay."

The effect was clear enough. American diplomacy was delivered into the hands of France. A month later, on a motion by James Madison, Adams' commission to negotiate a commercial treaty with Great Britain was revoked. Again the Southern states were solid with only Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire opposed. Vergennes's triumph was complete.

From the discussion of Adams' powers as minister plenipotentiary, Congress proceeded to review the peace commission. There was strong sentiment for adding Franklin as a negotiator but some influential members argued against the Pennsylvanian on the ground that he was a major investor in a Western land company whose best hope of realizing its claims lay in England retaining possession of those lands. Jay, also proposed, was objected to as being from a state whose interest lay in giving up the navigation of the Mississippi so that trade with the Northwest must perforce be diverted through New York to the profit of that state.

Finally it was decided to appoint five commissioners representing, so far as possible, the interests of all sections—Adams from New England, Jay from New York, Franklin from Pennsylvania, Jefferson from Virginia, and Henry Laurens from the deep South. Having appointed the five, Congress characteristically had second thoughts. Its experience with a number of ministers had not been a happy one. But Laurens was in the Tower of London and that left four, and Jefferson's sailing might be postponed indefinitely and that made three, which was not an unmanageable number.

In August the delegates went on to tie Adams' negotiations with the Dutch to the French alliance, instructing him to secure Vergennes's approval for a treaty between "His Most Christian Majesty, the United Provinces of the Netherlands, and the United States of America." Here again the French minister's hand reached through Luzerne directly into the halls of Congress.

Indeed, under Luzerne's skillful management, Congress performed like a trained seal. As to the mediation of the imperial courts, Luzerne assured Congress that France had raised the question of "the admission of an American plenipotentiary" and had pressed for statements as to "what footing the King of England intended to treat with the United States." These were the vaguest of assurances, yet Congress readily agreed to accept the mediation. What it came to was that Congress must trust the King, or, more specifically, Vergennes, and Luzerne, having put the matter thus, made it sound like a further benefaction of His Majesty which should make the Americans more than ever "feel that their honor and their interest call for their constant attachment, their friendship and unreserved confidence towards him."

While it appeared that the admission of an American plenipotentiary to the proposed congress presented "the greatest difficulties," Luzerne assured Congress that the Count would do his best for America's interest and that if it appeared impossible to secure representation for the United States "proper instructions" would be sent "concerning the conduct which the state of affairs will require from Congress." Luzerne felt it his duty to declare "freely and openly . . . that the moment is come not to spend the time in expectation, deliberation and useless exhortation." The King had done all that he could for America and now America must help herself. It was time for Congress "to relieve His Majesty from the heavy burdens in a war which he had undertaken and carries on for their sakes." Then came the familiar recital of the King's various benefactions.

Luzerne did not state nor did Congress ask why, in the name of reason, the most absolute monarchy in Europe had undertaken to patronize a group of remote and contentious republicans who were the avowed enemies of monarchs and the champions of principles in almost every way antithetical to the French Crown. Gratitude and submission were the price that Congress was required to pay. And pay it they did. It may well have been, as Adams insisted, that French interest and French policy were best served by all-out support of the United States and that Vergennes would have had no other course but to accept America, however reluctantly, as an equal partner, but Congress was in no position to try the experiment. Had the flow of French gold, French soldiers and French ships been checked or sharply diminished, the plight of Congress would have been desperate indeed. It was all very well for John Adams in Europe to take a bold and independent line, to insist upon equality, to stress the mutual advantages of the alliance, and to maintain that the United States would ultimately win its independence with or without French or any other aid. Congress had to face the grim facts of unpaid, poorly equipped and mutinous troops, of restless and dissatisfied officers, of an empty treasury and clamoring creditors. It had, consequently, no stomach for nice distinctions. It ate humble pie, took what the French gave, and asked for more.

XXXVI

IN AMSTERDAM, Adams was stricken by a severe illness. He was in a coma for five days and Thaxter despaired of his life. Only his Dutch physician's "masterly skill" brought him through the crisis, and even after the peak of the fever passed he remained weak and ill. Day after day he lay in his bed, "too low to do any kind of business," rousing himself when the fever relaxed its hold and then sinking back into a slough of illness and depression. Thaxter attended him faithfully, acting as nurse as well as secretary, patient and gentle, reading to him and taking letters at his dictation. But John missed Abigail acutely. However skillful Thaxter's care might be it was no substitute for the quiet efficiency of Abigail, for her homemade medicines and the comfort of her love. He felt sure he would die in this remote land far from Braintree and home. "A constitution ever infirm and almost half a hundred years old," he wrote when he had recovered a little of his strength, "cannot expect to fare very well amidst such cold damps and putrid streams as arise from the immense quantities of dead water that surround it."[1]

Laid low in August, it was the middle of October before he had recovered sufficiently to resume his activities as the agent of Congress to the Dutch Republic, and when he took up his duties it was in a morbid spirit. He was convinced that he was performing no useful function. There seemed no point in Congress' keeping him in Europe "with a view to my assisting at any conference for peace." The proposed congress at Vienna, he wrote, "will prove but a magnificent chimera." As for his efforts to negotiate a loan, they were equally discouraging. All he had raised was some two hundred pounds. "My loan," he wrote, "is considered not only as a new one but as entering deep into the essence of all the present political systems of the world, and no man dares engage in it until it is clearly determined what characters are to bear rule and what system is to prevail in this country. I am much inclined to believe," he added, "that nothing decisive will be done for two or three years, perhaps longer." His illness had unnerved him and he spoke gloomily of "the state of my health, which I have little reason to hope will be restored without a voyage home and more relaxation from care and business than I can have in Europe. . . . In short," he concluded, "my prospects both for the public and myself are so dull, and the life I am likely to lead in Europe is likely to be so gloomy and melancholy and of so little use to the public, that I cannot but wish it may suit with the views of Congress to recall me."[2]

The Dutch situation was enough to try the patience of a saint. And patience was a commodity Adams had little enough of. At the moment the United Provinces were especially agitated by a pamphlet which had attacked the Stadtholder in bitter terms and advocated a "democracy or regency of the people." The provincial assembly of Utrecht, where the pamphlet first appeared, denounced its author as an enemy of his country, offered a reward of fourteen hundred guilders for information about him and promised severe punishment to anyone who reprinted, distributed or even possessed a copy. The provinces of Holland and West Friesland followed suit, thereby, as Adams pointed out, drawing general attention to the illicit publication and arousing in everyone a determination to read it. To Adams the pamphlet indicated "that there is a party here, and a very numerous one, too, who are proselytes to democratical principles. Who and what," he asked, "has given rise to the assuming pride of the people, as it is called in Europe, in every part of which they have been so thoroughly abased?" The answer was "the American Revolution." "The precepts, the reasonings and example of the United States of America, disseminated by the press through every part of the world, have convinced the understanding and have touched the heart." When he said "democratical principles" Adams did not mean that the world in general was about to establish simple democracies, for these were impractical; it was rather "that multitudes are convinced that the people should have a voice, a share, and be made an integral part; and that the government should be such a mixture, and such a combination of the powers of one, the few and the many, as is best calculated to check and control each other, and oblige all to co-operate in this one democratical principle, that the end of all government is the happiness of the people; and in this other, that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the point to be obtained." These principles, the basic tenets of the American Revolution, had spread throughout Europe until every despotism, monarchy or aristocracy must make concessions to the democratic spirit "or hazard a total revolution in religion and government." It was to the interest of all the monarchs of Europe to get the war over and done with, for as long as it lasted the attention of the world would be fixed on the United States and the subjects of European nations would be stimulated to speculate "about the principles of government."[3] The truth was, as he wrote Abigail, the Revolution served "the great designs of Providence. The progress of society," he declared, "will be accelerated by centuries by this Revolution. The Emperor of Germany is adopting, as fast as he can, American ideas of toleration and religious liberty, and it will become the fashionable system of all Europe very soon. Light spreads from the dayspring in the west, and may it shine more and more until the perfect day!"[4]

While Adams convalesced from his "nervous fever" events were taking a course in America that would considerably simplify his diplomatic tasks. Cornwallis, having landed at Charleston, South Carolina, after Clinton's investment of the city in the winter of 1780, had proceeded to operate in the South, harassed by Greene and Morgan. As British forces moved into Virginia, Lafayette and Wayne, joined by Von Steuben, hung on his flanks. Thus beset, Cornwallis withdrew to the northern neck of Virginia to establish a base at Yorktown where he hoped to be supplied and reinforced by the British fleet under Admiral Rodney. Meantime Rochambeau and some four thousand French soldiers joined Washington above New York. There word reached the American General that Admiral de Grasse with a strong French fleet was on his way to the Chesapeake Bay from the West Indies. The usually reserved Washington jumped with joy when he read the dispatch and, making a feint at New York, hurried with his army and Rochambeau's to Virginia where De Grasse, having defeated Graves off the capes of the Chesapeake, blocked Cornwallis' relief. The joint American-French army took up the siege of Yorktown late in September. For three weeks Washington drew the noose tighter until Cornwallis at last surrendered his army of eight thousand soldiers on October 19, 1781.

Yorktown was a bitter blow to the British. Although it was six weeks before word of the defeat reached Europe, when it came it was decisive. England was simply not in a position to replace eight thousand of its finest soldiers. The war was in fact at an end although it would drag on for almost two more years before a final peace was concluded.

As John was about to depart from The Hague to make fresh representations to the Dutch government, he received the dispatches from Congress which informed him of the curtailment of his powers and the augmentation of the peace mission to five members (the instructions of April 17, 1781, were not included). Considering the light in which he subsequently came to view this act, his first reaction was surprisingly mild. He wrote cheerfully to James Searle, "I am a sheep and . . . I have been fleeced, but it gives me some pleasure to reflect that my wool makes others warm. . . . I am a bird, that my feathers have been plucked and worn as ornaments by others. Let them have the plumage if they will, it is but a geegaw."[5] To Dana he wrote that the addition of the other commissioners and the revocation of his commission to make a treaty of commerce with Great Britain were "novelties" that "would nettle some men's feelings, but I am glad of them." Indeed, it seemed to Adams that the policy of Congress was a kind of backhanded compliment. The delegates to Congress had been "obliged to adopt our systems of war and politics in order to gain influence enough, by means of them, to lessen us. . . . I will consent upon these terms to be diminished down to the size of a Lilliputian, or of an animalcule in pepper water."

His comment to Warren on the appointment of the additional peace commissioners was that "Congress have done very well to join others in the commission for peace who have some faculties for it. My talent, if I have one, lies in making war." Certainly he was by nature more combative than conciliatory. To him the change was "a demonstration of greater respect to the powers of Europe and must be more satisfactory to the people of America than any former one; besides that, it guards against accidents, which in my late sickness I had reason to think may well happen."[6]

The same dispatches that brought Adams news of the new commission for the peace also informed Francis Dana, secretary to the mission, that he had been appointed by Congress as minister plenipotentiary to the Russian court, without any assurance, however, that he would be received. When Adams heard of his friend's new assignment he wrote a letter of encouragement and advice. He should be candid as to his position on all issues and be guided by the advice of experienced diplomats. "The United States of America," he noted, "have nothing dishonorable to propose to any court or country. The wishes of America . . . are for the good of all nations. . . . Her cause is that of all nations and all men, and it needs nothing but to be explained to be approved; at least," he added, "these are my sentiments." With the achievement of independence "the world will then see the power and resources of three or four millions of virtuous men inhabiting a fine country . . . contending for everything which renders life worth supporting."[7]

Dana's situation in Russia would doubtless be like Adams' in the Netherlands. "If, without being received, we can gain and communicate information," he wrote, "we shall answer a good end." Dana had no personal secretary and Congress had made no provision for one. After some debate and with considerable misgivings, Adams decided to send the thirteen-year-old John Quincy to St. Petersburg with Dana as his private secretary. John Quincy had blossomed in his months at the University of Leyden. His handwriting quite suddenly had taken on the neat, orderly script that was to characterize it for the rest of his life. If he was to be prepared for a career as a diplomat-politician it was perhaps impossible to start too soon. At St. Petersburg he could continue his studies under the tutelage of Dana and be of use to the latter as a scribe, copying diplomatic correspondence and recording official and unofficial letters in the minister's letterbook.

With John Quincy gone Charles suffered acutely from homesickness. He was too young to endure with fortitude his long absence from his mother and his isolated life at Leyden. He became so homesick that John was concerned about him. The return to America of a Boston friend, Major William Jackson, provided an opportunity to send Charles to Braintree and Adams arranged with Jackson to take the homesick boy under his wing.

When Adams arrived at The Hague he conferred promptly with the Duke de la Vauguyon on the best steps to be taken to prod the Dutch out of their lethargy. The Duke, acting on Vergennes's instructions, advised Adams to follow a go-slow policy in regard to the States-General. France had its own game to play in that uneasy nation and it did not wish to have Adams blundering about, complicating or frustrating its maneuvers.

But Vauguyon was too suave and experienced a diplomat to seem to oppose Adams' plans. John set off in late October for another one of his jaunts with the conviction that Vauguyon was thoroughly in sympathy with the campaign to enlist Dutch patriots in the American cause and to exert pressures on the States-General to recognize American independence by inducing the assemblies of particular provinces to pass resolutions supporting the United States. "The miffs at Versailles and Passy seem to be wearing away," he wrote Dana optimistically.[8]

Congress had decided in the fall of 1781 to "new-model" its foreign affairs by appointing a secretary "through whose hands the communications with their ministers abroad are to pass." The first secretary was Robert Livingston, the New Yorker, chosen primarily because he was acceptable to Luzerne. As soon as Livingston took office he wrote to Adams advising him to be patient. The Dutch, he pointed out, had a right to proceed at their own pace. Too much pressure from the American minister might cause a reaction—"your prudence will suggest to you to avoid giving offense to government by the appearance of intrigue." He rebuked Adams for presenting his credentials to the States-General and publishing his memorial. In the future Adams should confine himself to "a very narrow compass." Keep informed, penetrate the intricacies of party politics, combat English intrigues and remain in the character of a private gentleman—these were his proper concerns.[9]

But Adams had gone too far in his efforts to wrest recognition from the Dutch government to be deflected by the admonitions of the new secretary. When he returned from his tour, he had decided on a course of action. He would press the States-General directly and "categorically" to accept his credentials. When he divulged his plan to Vauguyon, the

French diplomat was dismayed. He was strongly opposed to Adams' approaching the States-General; Adams must at least wait until the Duke had had a chance to refer the question to Vergennes. Adams, anticipating the Count's opposition, insisted on pushing ahead.

On the eighth of January he went to The Hague and there, with Dumas, waited on the President of their high mightinesses, demanding from the States-General a "categorical answer" to his request for an audience at which to present his credentials. From the President, Adams went to the Grand Pensionary, who excused himself on the grounds of sickness. From there he went the rounds—to the Pensionary of Dort, to the house of Leyden, to the quarters of the deputation from Haarlem, where he was assured that he might depend "upon the esteem, affection and friendship of the city of Haarlem, and that they heartily wished a connection between the two republics," but of course they themselves could do nothing. They must refer the matter to their constituents, the regency. So it was at the houses of Rotterdam, Gouda and Brille. Yet the auspices seemed favorable. His "affectionate and friendly reception" encouraged him, but he reminded himself and Congress that "the constitution of government is so complicated and whimsical a thing, and the temper and character of the people so peculiar," that it was impossible to predict the outcome. "They are afraid of everybody," he wrote, "afraid of France, afraid of America, England, Russia and the northern powers."[10]

Finally the province of Friesland resolved to acknowledge the independence of the United States. The first burgomaster of Amsterdam assured Adams that in another six weeks all the provinces would follow suit, but Adams had been too often disappointed to accept this optimistic estimate. He reported the Dutch attitude in an imaginary dialogue: "We wait for Spain," he was told in effect, "and we wait for Russia. We won't make any treaty with you. It is of no great importance to us or to you. We see there is a tremendous power arising in the west. We can't meddle much, but we will at all events be your good friends. Whoever quarrels with you, we will not."[11]

The action of Friesland had the anticipated effect on the other provinces. Although the efforts of Adams' friend, the Baron Van der Capellen, failed to bring the province of Gelderland into line, the citizens of Leyden presented a petition to the council of that city urging recognition of the independence of the United States and the prompt negotiation of a treaty of commerce with "a country which, already peopled by several million of inhabitants, augments every day in population in a manner incredible." In Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Dort similar petitions were addressed to the regencies of the respective cities, urging recognition and the negotiation of a treaty. Their "noble and grand mightinesses, the lords of the States of Holland and West Friesland," added their voices, "in the strongest manner, that Mr. Adams be admitted and acknowledged as soon as possible by their high mightinesses as the ambassador of the United States of America."

The great ice jam of the States-General seemed at last to be breaking up and with these rumblings came word of peace feelers from England. Thomas Digges, the former Marylander living in England with whom Adams had corresponded, appeared at Amsterdam professing to have been directed by the British ministry to ascertain whether there was any person or persons in Europe commissioned by Congress to treat for peace, and whether "they were NOW willing to avail themselves of such commission, and of the present sincere disposition of the ministry to treat." He assured Adams that if he carried back word of a disposition on his part to open negotiations the ministry would respond promptly. Adams, receiving Digges in front of Thaxter as a witness, answered guardedly. "There were certainly commissioners in Europe, of which body he was one, who had powers to treat and conclude upon peace." But a proper offer must first be made. He himself could not now or in the future answer any questions about a treaty without conferring with his fellow commissioners. The best procedure for Digges to follow would be to write directly to Franklin and the Count de Vergennes.[12]

Adams was convinced that the presentation of his memorial and his request for an audience with their high mightinesses gave heart to the anti-British faction and made his own position tolerable, and he defended his action stoutly in a long letter to Livingston: "Your veterans in diplomatics and in affairs of state consider us as a kind of militia, and hold us perhaps, as is natural, in some degree of contempt; but wise men know that militia sometimes gain victories over regular troops even by departing from the rules."[13]

On the nineteenth of April, Adams' long siege finally carried its objective. Their high mightinesses the States-General of the United Provinces resolved to accept Adams "in the quality of envoy the United States of North America," and "that there shall be granted to him an audience . . . when he shall demand it." The resolution was followed by an interview with "His Most Serene Highness the Prince of Orange." The Prince spoke English and Adams made a graceful speech expressing his pleasure at being the instrument of a closer connection between two nations "professing the same religion, animated by the same spirit of liberty and having reciprocal interests, both political and commercial." (To the Princess he spoke of his pleasure in presenting to her protection "a virgin republic—an infant world" and was charmed by the lady's gracious words of greeting.)

The Prince opened and read Adams' credentials and then chatted briefly with him. How long had he been in Europe? Had he purchased a house at The Hague? How long had he lived at Leyden? How had he liked Holland? Adams answered, bowed and withdrew. So he passed the first barrier, recognition. The next day he set about securing a treaty as a preliminary to the desperately needed loan, and was more convinced than ever of the wisdom of his course in pressing the States-General for recognition. So cumbersome and dilatory was the decision-making process in the Dutch states that months were required for action on the simplest measures. By applying at the earliest possible moment for acceptance as minister plenipotentiary from the United States, Adams had helped to rally the anti-British faction, had called attention to his own mission, issued a dramatic appeal for Dutch-American friendship and fixed the issue of his status firmly in everyone's consciousness. If his subsequent demand for a categorical answer from the States-General was well timed, his first request was equally so. In these two steps he created and then reinforced a subtle but persistent pressure drawing the Dutch away from their British ties toward America and France. On the question of Adams' acceptance the Dutch patriots were able to rally all their forces.

The day after his audience with the Prince their high mightinesses appointed a committee to take up the matter of a treaty between the two powers. Adams, with great formality, was introduced to the committee by two Dutch noblemen and thereupon presented to that body a copy of a treaty which he had drawn up on the basis of his instructions from Congress. "I prayed the gentlemen," he related to Livingston, "to examine it and propose to me their objections, if they should have any, and to propose any further articles which they should think proper." The treaty rested on the "Plan of 1776" which Adams, as a member of Continental Congress, had helped to draft. It incorporated the principles of "free ships, free goods," limited contraband, and the freedom of neutrals to trade with unblockaded belligerent ports.

As Adams reviewed the steps that led to his recognition, he discerned in them the workings of divine Providence. His commission to negotiate a loan, the interception of Laurens by the British, his replacement of his friend convinced him that there was a higher power at work ordering such events, a power of whom he was only the diligent instrument. Yet he was careful to allow room for his own skill and enterprise as the instrument. "Without money, without friends, and in opposition to mean intrigue," he had carried his point, "by the still small voice of reason, and persuasion, triumphant against the uninterrupted opposition of family connections, court influence and aristocratical despotism. . . . But you will hear all this represented as a thing . . . of little consequence," he wrote Abigail, "easily done and not worth much. Very well! Thank God it is done, and that is what I wanted."[14]

Adams was convinced that without his efforts the United Provinces would have joined the English—"nothing but that well-hove harpoon iron thrown by a Cape Cod whaleman, the memorial of 19th April, 1781, and the other innumerable measures taken in consequence of it by the same hand, could ever have prevented this Republic from making a separate peace with England." His relations with the Duke de la Vauguyon had been the most friendly and intimate ones possible, and a relationship of mutual advantage, in Adams' opinion. He felt that the Duke was under "infinite obligations to the United States of America and her minister for the successes he has had in this country." At the same time it was true, Adams wrote Livingston, "that I acknowledge . . . with pleasure and gratitude that our cause could not have succeeded here without the aid of France. . . . The favorable and friendly exertions of her ambassador, after the decisive steps taken by me, contributed essentially to the accomplishment of the work."[15] "I may think more highly of it than it deserves, but it has ever appeared to me the turning point," he wrote of his acceptance by the States-General. With this obstacle passed, he felt more charitably inclined toward his Dutch hosts. "If the war continues," he informed Dana, "there will be found in this nation a strong spirit of liberty and a great deal of obstinate valor." To Jenings he declared: "I shall love the Dutch nation till I die, although most other men, perhaps every man of spirit in my circumstances, would have cursed them and quitted them long ago."[16]

Now that he was officially recognized his time was taken up constantly in receiving and paying visits to all the members and officers of the government. With Dumas at his elbow, a faithful guide and adviser through the intricacies of Dutch politics, Adams left his card at the houses of all the members of the States-General, all the headquarters of the cities of Holland, and with all the ministers of neutral courts.

To celebrate Adams' recognition the Duke de la Vauguyon gave a handsome reception for the diplomatic corps of The Hague in honor of the United States and Adams was introduced by the Duke to his colleagues, the ministers of the foreign courts. It was a great moment for Adams. "There is nothing, I suppose," he wrote to Livingston of his triumph, "in the whole voluminous ceremonial, nor in all the idle farce of etiquette, which should hinder a minister from making a good dinner in good company, and therefore I believe they were all present. . . . The Duke de la Vauguyon more than compensated for all the stiffness of some others by paying more attention to the new brother than to all the old fraternity." The aloof and "mysterious air" of ministers of nations which had not recognized American independence both piqued and amused Adams. It was absurb to see some pompous character who represented a nation "not half equal to America in any one attribute of sovereignty" affect an hauteur and coolness.[17]

Any irritation at such diplomatic punctilio was more than compensated for by the Spanish minister, who bowed to Adams and said: "You, sir, have struck the greatest blow in all Europe. It is the best blow that has ever been struck in the American cause. It will be a fright and terror to the Anglomanes. It will kindle the enthusiasm of this nation. It is you who have turned their heads in the right direction." Then turning to a fellow diplomat, he added, "I do not say these things to compliment Mr. Adams; it is because in truth I see that it is so." This was sweet music for John. He hoarded and treasured the Spaniard's praise and repeated it to whoever would listen.[18]

But Adams had not accomplished his aims without stirring up resentment and bitterness. An anonymous critic sent a letter denouncing him to Franklin, who forwarded it on to Adams. John was too sensitive to ignore it as the work of a crank. He copied it over in his own hand and the words were like gall to him. The writer accused Adams of having been the dupe of Tories and rascals, of having his faculties impaired by his fever, of an endless "series of blunders" which had ruined the credit and the dignity of the United States, of obstinacy and madness—a "lying dick" whose word was not to be given credence. "Verily Congress injured themselves," the writer added, "in not confining his talents to their forte as a legislator and lawyer. In his lucid intervals his abilities may be still great, but he wants most of those requisites for a minister and some so essential that, if continued here, more injury than good will result from it." As for his role in winning acknowledgment of American independence, he had caused so much disgust in Holland that if the Dutch had not been determined upon such a course "his conduct would, if not wholly prevented it, at least have retarded it much."[19]

Still another poison-pen letter, addressed directly to Adams, termed him "a mongrel," worse "than a dog," full of "chicanery," a "pettifogging attorney" who was despised by the world, "nor," the writer added, "can all thy puffs and self-written panegyric persuade the contrary."[20] The rancorous words made Adams squirm as he read but there was a kind of bitter satisfaction in them. They showed that in a fallen world abuse and vituperation were the reward for doing one's duty. The barbs made him suffer; the suffering man was the justified man.

To complicate his manifold duties Adams' recovery from his fever continued to be slow. He wrote Dana in March, "My health is so feeble that it fatigues me more to write one letter than it did to write ten when we were together at Paris. In short I confess to you a truth that is not very pleasant. I really believe your old friend will never be again the man that he has been. That hideous fever has shaken him to pieces, so that he will never get firmly compacted together again."[21] He was convinced that he would die "a martyr to the Dutch alliance," but he hired a horse and began to take a ride every morning, which, he wrote Abigail, had been "of great service to my health."[22]

With the Dutch at last on the right track, Adams concerned himself with the maddening procrastinations and evasions of the neutral powers. "Once in my life the words *piddling*, etc.," he wrote Dana, "cost me very dear, but I shall never get them out of my head. I shall be plagued with piddling politicians as long as I live. There are at this moment so many politicians piddling about peace, general and separate, that I am sick to the death of it." He could not understand why the neutral powers could not see that their best interest would be served by recognizing American independence. They should declare: "America is one of us, and we will all share in her commerce. . . . These words once pronounced, peace is made, or at least soon and easily made. Without it, all may nibble and piddle and dribble and fribble, waste a long time, immense treasures and much human blood, and they must come to it at last."[23]

A pleasant note was sounded by the town of Schiedam, which wished to honor Adams with a public dinner, and by the students of the University of Franeker in Harlingen who, feeling that the recognition of American independence by Holland was "one of the most important events known to history," invited him to celebrate the occasion with "a display of fireworks embellished with decorations suitable to American independence."[24]

As minister plenipotentiary to the Netherlands, Adams must take up his residence at The Hague. It was decided that Madame Dumas would help him furnish the "large and elegant house in a fine situation on a noble spot of ground" that he purchased as, in effect, the American embassy—the Hôtel des Etats-Unis—and move in with her family to keep house and act informally as hostess.

Madame Dumas, delighted at the opportunity, stocked the house in handsome style. An inventory showed such items as "30 Bocate goblets . . . 12 chafing dishes . . . 22 English wine glasses flat . . . 9 dozen and 2 wine glasses small . . . 19 Rhenish glasses . . . 12 small decanters . . . 8 yellow metal candlesticks . . . 6 blue spitting pots, Queens Ware . . . 3 doz and 9 Queens Ware soup plates . . . 6 great round dishes . . . 47 soup plates, 4 tureens with tops, 3 large tea sets." There were "16 chairs in green damask with their covers for antechamber. . . . For the salon 1 large rug turquoise; a canopy of red damask; 6 armchairs with cushions and 6 without; one large mirror gilded; a marble table." The color scheme in the living room and dining room was gray and turquoise. John Thaxter's bedroom was furnished in red and yellow—curtains and bedspread, a yellow cotton figured with red flowers.[25]

There must be a room prepared for John Quincy against the day of his return from St. Petersburg. Madame Dumas, touched by Adams' devotion for his absent son, lavished special care on the boy's room. It had a mahogany bureau, a handsome rug with a red flower pattern that was picked up in the red upholstered chairs; a writing desk, a round, painted table, bookcase, wardrobe and a mahogany bed covered by a charming quilt with red, white and blue flowers.

John's own spacious bedroom contained three mahogany bureaus, a mahogany secretary and two small mahogany tables. Beside the large gold mirror were small gold-framed portraits of Samuel Adams, of Charles and of John Quincy, and on the tall bureau a black leather box full of assorted nails, a mahogany razor box, a tobacco box and a thermometer. In this bedroom the colors were green and gray—six chairs covered with green damask, green curtains, and a green damask bedspread lined with taffeta. He felt a little wicked as he crawled into the luxurious feather bed. Pillowed in down, he thought of the uncompromising hardness of a New England horsehair mattress.

When the house was furnished the Dumases moved in to await Adams' arrival from Amsterdam where he struggled to negotiate the desperately needed loan which Congress had so long anticipated. As he proceeded with his efforts to secure the loan, he encountered repeated setbacks. Nothing like five million guilders seemed available. "The affair of the loan gives me much anxiety and fatigue," he wrote Franklin. ". . . cash is not infinite in this country. Their profits by trade have been ruined for two or three years, and there are loans open for France, Spain, England, Russia, Sweden, Denmark and several other powers as well as their own national, provincial and collegiate loans . . . and all the brokers in the Republic are so engaged that there is scarcely a ducat to be lent but what is promised."[26]

On the positive side, although funds seemed almost unattainable, there was hot competition among the Dutch bankers to undertake the American loan. Adams found himself besieged with requests and embarrassed at the necessity of making a choice. Although none of the banking houses was prepared to guarantee the loan, almost all wished the honor of being chosen to attempt the negotiation.[27] Adams finally settled on a co-operative venture between these banking houses—Willink, Van Staphorst, De la Lande and Fynje. These bankers agreed to take the loan at a four and half per cent charge and to do their best to obtain subscriptions to fill up the sum, initially, of five million livres.

Before Adams' return to The Hague, William Vaughan, an Englishman friendly to the American cause, came to Adams' house. Henry Laurens, he told him, was on parole at Haarlem and wished to see him. Lord North had resigned in March after his ministry had been repudiated by Parliament without a division. Charles James Fox, who had led the opposition to North and who was in favor of independence for the Americans, was unacceptable to the King, who offered the government to Lord Shelburne. Rockingham, under whose former ministry the Stamp Act had been repealed, proved the only man able to form a new government and in this government Shelburne, with the portfolio of Secretary of State for the

Southern Department (which included home, Irish and colonial affairs), acted as a kind of intermediary between the King and Rockingham. Charles James Fox was appointed Secretary of the Northern Department, which dealt with foreign affairs.

There was a deep-seated rivalry between the two men and both tried to take over the negotiation of a treaty with the United States. Shelburne, after an initial feeler by Franklin, sent Richard Oswald, a Scottish merchant who was reputed to have made a fortune in the slave trade and who had spent his youth in Virginia, to France. Oswald and Laurens had been dispatched together, Laurens to sound out Adams, and Oswald to confer with Franklin.

Adams went to Haarlem and talked with his old friend about the possible terms of a peace negotiation. Laurens agreed with Adams that the United States should insist on an open or tacit recognition of their independence as a preliminary to a treaty and that they should further do their best to secure Canada and Nova Scotia as part of a treaty agreement. Laurens, Adams wrote Franklin, "has a very poor opinion both of the integrity and abilities of the new ministry. . . . He thinks they know not what they are about, that they are spoiled by the same impurity, duplicity, falsehood and corruption, with the former." Yet in Laurens' view "the nation and the best men in it are for universal peace and express acknowledgment of American independence, and many of the best are for giving up Canada and Nova Scotia." Laurens' mission was apparently to determine if Digges's report of his discussion with Adams was true. After several hours of conversation the friends parted, and Adams returned to Amsterdam to write an account of his interview to Franklin.[28]

Meanwhile, Fox sent his own agent, Thomas Grenville, to Versailles to sound out Vergennes and Franklin. It was Fox's hope that France would demand such terms as would alienate America and make it possible to negotiate a separate peace with the former colonies. This plan failed because Vergennes countered it with the proposal that Britain and the United States should negotiate directly and France and Great Britain do the same, insisting only that the final signing should have the concurrence of both parties.

When Rockingham died on July 1, Shelburne became Prime Minister, Fox resigned and Shelburne took the entire negotiations into his own hands. Up to this point the rivalry of Fox and Shelburne had delayed the progress of peace discussions. Oswald was a pliant and rather gullible intermediary who listened sympathetically to Franklin's bland suggestions that England cede Canada to the United States and endorsed, in his letters to his superiors, many of Franklin's proposals; Franklin, in his conversations with Oswald, set the pattern for proceeding independently of Vergennes. The shrewd Pennsylvanian, who had seemed to Adams to be so much under the thumb of Vergennes, did not hesitate, when he felt it to his country's advantage, to deviate from his instructions, and to be far less confiding in the French minister than he had made it a practice to be on less important issues.

XXXVII

In the middle of May, Adams moved from Amsterdam to The Hague and established himself with Dumas and his family at the Hôtel des Etats-Unis. He hoped that the change would improve his questionable health, but instead he, Thaxter and Joseph Stevens all contracted severe fevers. Adams was so ill and weak that he could make only a gesture toward carrying on public business. He fell into one of his depressive moods. He could not endure John Quincy's absence any longer. It had been folly to ship him off to St. Petersburg. "I feel more lonely than I used to as my health is not so good," he wrote Dana, "and my spirits still worse. I want my wife and children about me. I must go home. I can't live so—it is too much. . . . I am weary, my friend, of the dastardly meannesses of jealousy and envy. It is mortifying, it is humiliating to me to the last degree."[1] John Quincy must come back to Holland to resume his studies and be a companion to his father.

Wretched and low-spirited, Adams missed Abigail keenly. "I must go to you or you must come to me," he wrote her; "I cannot live in this horrid solitude, which it is to me, amidst courts, camps and crowds. . . . A child was never more weary of a whistle than I am of embassies."[2] "What a fine affair it would be," he exclaimed, "if we could flit across the Atlantic as they say the angels do from planet to planet! I would dart to Penn's Hill and bring you over on my wings. . . . One thing I am determined on. If God should please to restore me once more to your fireside, I shall never again leave it without your ladyship's company—no, not even to go to Congress to Philadelphia, and there I am determined to go, if I can make interest enough to get chosen, whenever I return." He clung to his image of himself as a gruff, honest, independent fellow. "I assure you," he wrote, "it is much wholesomer to be a complaisant, good-humored, contented courtier than a grumbletonian patriot, always whining and snarling." His own "courtierism" he feared would never be very successful—"I must be an independent man."[3]

With the improvement of his health, his spirits revived. There were indications, at last, that with the fall of the North ministry England was prepared to enter seriously into peace negotiations. Seeing her brought low by a series of setbacks and defeats, Adams experienced a strange moment of tenderness. "My bowels of compassion begin to be moved," he wrote Jenings, "for this blind, debauched, devoted old woman Britannia; is there no possibility of reforming and saving her?"[4]

Most encouraging of all, the terms and the papers involved in the Dutch loan of five million guilders were completed early in July; Adams wrote Livingston informing him of the fact, enclosing copies of the loan agreement in Dutch and English, and requesting that Congress ratify the loan promptly and refrain from drawing on it until Adams sent word that the loan was filling and that there was an appreciable sum in the hands of the Dutch bankers. He was satisfied that the contract was as favorable as any that could be obtained. Five per cent (the interest on the loan) was what the French were paying and much less than many other powers had had to pay for Dutch money. It turned out that the loan was taken up much faster than Adams had anticipated. By the early part of August, Messrs. Staphorst, Willink, etc., had received 1,484,000 florins, and Adams was able to advise Congress that it might begin to draw on the Dutch bankers.

Thus, despite the perplexities and stresses of his office, Adams began to relish life again and above all the absorbing game of diplomacy. "It is a pretty amusement," he wrote James Warren, "to play a game with nations, as if they were fox and geese—or corns upon a checkerboard . . . is it not? It is however the real employment of statesmen to play such a game sometimes. . . . Politics are the divine science after all. How is it possible that any man should ever think of making it subservient to his own little passions and mean private interests? . . . Is the end of politics a fortune, a family, a gilded coach, a train of horses, a troop of livery servants—balls at court—splendid dinners and suppers—Yet the divine science of politics is at length in Europe reduced to a mechanical system composed of these materials." The disinterested statesman would have to trust to posterity for his reward; "although he will not make his own fortune he will make the fortune of his country. Oh, peace," he cried out, "when wilt thou permit me to visit Penn Hill, Milton Hill and all the Blue Hills? I love every tree and every rock upon all those mountains, roving among these and the quails, partridges, squirrels, etc., that inhabit them shall be the amusement of my declining years, God willing. I won't go to Vermont [Abigail had bought some Vermont lands as a small speculation]. I must be within the scent of the sea."[5]

A few weeks later he wrote Abigail, "I am going to dinner with a duke and a duchess and a number of ambassadors and senators. In all the luxury of this luxurious world; but how much more luxurious it would be to me to dine upon roast beef with Parson Smith [Abigail's father], Dr.

Tufts or Norton Q.—or upon rusticated potatoes with Portia—Oh! Oh! hi ho hum! and her daughter and sons." His diplomatic success had made him a person of some consequence, he told his wife. "I am now happy in the intimacy of many leading characters," he noted, "and know their views and designs very well and we may depend upon their steady attachment to us and to the good system." The life of an ambassador, now that the crisis had passed and the primary mission been accomplished, he found to be "an insipid life. . . . I wish it were at an end." He had no greater ambition than to be a selectman once more with Colonel Quincy in Braintree. "If the company of princes and princesses, dukes and duchesses, comtes and comtesses could make me happy," he wrote, "I might easily be so—but my admired princess is at the Blue Hills where all my ambition and all my wishes tend."

Yet however he might avow his desire to return to Braintree, it was clear that he found the Dutch, now that he had no longer to suffer from their maddening procrastinations, extremely congenial. "I love the people where I am," he wrote. "They have faults but they have deep wisdom and great virtues—and they love America and will be her everlasting friend. . . . I would do a great deal to serve this nation, I own." Braintree was often in his thoughts. What was the power of this remote village set in the intractable granite hills? "I know not the reason but there is some strange attraction between the North Parish in Braintree and my heart. It has vomited forth more fire than Mount Etna. It has produced three mortals, Hancock and two Adamses, who have, with the best intentions in the world, set the world in a blaze. I say two Adamses," he added, "because the head of the Senate [Samuel] is from thence as his father was born there. Glorious as the flame is, I wish I could put it out." People had said to John that he was born for such stormy times. "It is true," he wrote Abigail, "I was born to be in such times but was not made for them; they affect too tenderly my heart."[6]

With the main purposes of his mission well in hand, with the loan negotiated and the Dutch treaty making slow but steady progress through the strange involutions of the Dutch system, Adams found time to indulge himself a little in the social life of the diplomatic corps and in the company of congenial and sympathetic Dutchmen. He found one of the latter in a Mr. Lionet, an ancient gentleman of seventy-five, "in full health, strength and vivacity." Lionet, like many prosperous Hollanders, had a hobby horse, a *Liefhebbery*. "It is the wholesomest exercise in the world," John wrote Abigail. "They live to great ages by the strength of it." Mr. Lionet's hobby horse had been science. During his long life he had amassed a great collection of sea shells and insects, and he conducted Adams through his museum. In two hours they had not seen half of the shells—an astonishing variety of shapes and colors, whorled, fluted, grooved, spired, strange and beautiful extravagances of nature, pink, stark white, silver, coral, delicate blue, beige—the exhaustion of a narrow spectrum of pastels. From the shells they passed to insects. Beginning with caterpillars, his host had filled a folio volume with that species and engraved the plates himself. "He thus rode his hobby horse and lived," he wrote Abigail; "without it, he would have died fifty years ago. Have you," he asked teasingly of his wife—a farmer's wife, to whom caterpillars were mortal enemies—"a curiosity to read and inspect cuts of the anatomy of caterpillars, their nerves, blood, juices, bones, hair, senses, intellects, etc., etc.? Their moral sense, laws, government, manners and customs? I don't know," he added, "whether he teaches the manner of destroying them and saving the apple tree. I doubt not the book is worth studying. All nature is so. But I have too much to do to study men, and their mischievous designs upon apple trees and other things, ever to be very intimate with Mr. Lionet . . . or his book." Men would be Adams' hobby horse, their inscrutable ways and unperceived destiny; perhaps the study of men would keep him alive almost as long as the venerable Mr. Lionet.[7]

Adams' principal contacts with his fellow diplomats were at the weekly receptions given by the Stadtholder and at the dinners of the Duke de la Vauguyon. At the Duke's he encountered the Baron d'Ehrenswerd, the minister from Sweden, a learned, civil man. The Prussian minister, Baron von Thulemeier, Adams found especially congenial. In his own expression, he "attacked" Adams in English marked by a thick German accent. They found a common interest, "being both great riders," and talked of astronomy and natural history, of battles, sieges and the revolutions of empires, scrupulously avoiding any mention of contemporary politics. Monsieur de St. Saphorin, the Danish envoy, was an eccentric man who made no effort to conceal his support for England. The Sardinian minister was a garrulous and inept little man, rather pathetically eager to enter into conversation but generally ignored by his colleagues as the representative of an insignificant nation.

The most spectacular member of the diplomatic corps was the Portuguese envoy extraordinary, the rich young nobleman, Don Juan de Almeida, covered with glittering decorations, the giver of magnificent parties to which Adams, since Portugal did not recognize the United States, was not invited. De Almeida was affable enough to Adams when they met on such neutral ground as the weekly diplomatic dinners at the Dutch court. There they discussed the climate of Portugal and America and the commerce that might be carried on between the two countries once a general peace had been established. Rich and titled as the young man might be, Adams found he had a poor grasp of political matters.

The Spanish minister, Don Llano, the Count of Santa Fe, was a Spanish grandee of enormous elegance with the cold gravity of his nation. Since Spain was an ally of America's ally, France, Adams thought he might have received some notice from the Spaniard, but that gentleman surrounded himself with an impenetrable wall of diplomatic punctilio and did not deign to notice the American's existence after their first encounter at the Duke's. The Count's attitude rankled Adams the more since he already held Spain chargeable with dilatoriness and even downright bad faith in not formally acknowledging the independence of the United States and supporting its struggle against Britain. But the Spaniard had more than compensated for all his stiffness and reserve by the treasured compliment that he paid Adams after John had been received as American minister by the States-General. It was an accolade that he wore proudly to his dying day.

Monsieur Magis, envoy for twenty-eight years from the Bishop of Liége, was the dean of the *corps diplomatique* and from this wise old man Adams received much information and good advice. He took to heart Magis's warning that England's power was far from spent. "Sir," the old diplomat said to Adams, "the wheel rolls on too long and too rapidly one way; it must roll back again somewhat to its proper center. The power of the House of Bourbon rises, and that of Great Britain sinks too fast." Adams' answer was that it was the role of the neutral powers, not of the United States, to redress the balance, and this they could do promptly and effectively by inviting her to become a member of the armed neutrality.[8] Adams was amused by the envoy's wistful reflection on his diplomatic career. "Between the two of us, sir," Magis confided, "if I were young, I would endeavor to serve a great power, because one has a chance to do something; but when one serves a small power, one is sure never to be anything." To be envoy of the Bishop of Liége afforded little range for talents in diplomacy. Seeing the world in a paroxysm and this country lawyer from a distant wilderness moving men and events made Monsieur Magis reflect ruefully on the futility of his own career.

Adams' daily rides kept up his health and his spirits. He rode frequently with Dutch friends, among them Monsieur Van der Dussen, Lieutenant General of Cavalry. The General rode a fine English horse covered with a white silk net. He and Adams cantered through the countryside, passing men digging peat out of the sand dunes and, at the downs near Leyden, hunters in search of hares and rabbits. The General, not too confident of the aim or the discretion of his countrymen, expressed the fear that they might be shot, presumably for rabbits. Van der Dussen's special interest, it turned out, was Indians, and as they rode along he plied Adams with dozens of questions about the manners and customs of the American aborigines.

At the home of his riding companion, who was also deputy to the States-General from Holland, Adams sat down to dinner with a distinguished company: the Spanish minister, Monsieur Boreel, also a deputy to the States-General, and his wife, and the Geelvinks (he was a member of the Council of State for Amsterdam). Madame Boreel, sitting next to Adams, asked if he understood Dutch. "Very little," he answered, "but I have made a beginning. I have at my house two ingenious young gentlemen with whom I attempt every morning, aided by a dictionary, to read the Dutch newspapers." Madame Boreel passed on to the company her dinner partner's accomplishment and Monsieur Geelvink called out, *"Leese Mynheer de Diemermeersche Courant?" "Ja wel, Mynheer,"* Adams answered triumphantly, *"en de Hollandsche Historiesche Courant, ook."*

In addition to the Lieutenant General, Adams struck up a close friendship with Count de Sarsfield. Sarsfield, a native of Brittany, a famous conversationalist, *bon vivant,* intellectual and political radical, appointed himself a kind of Dutch uncle to Adams. He lectured him good-humoredly on the proper etiquette to be observed by the American minister. When he entertained, he should place the French ambassador on his right and the minister of Spain on his left, and when the company rose from the table he should say to each of his guests in order of precedence, *"Messieur le Duc, voudriez vous . . ."* Adam listened patiently to his friend's instructions and then wrote in his diary, "How is it possible to reconcile these trifling contemplations of a master of ceremonies with the vast knowledge of arts, sciences, history, government, etc., possessed by this nobleman?" But he was too grateful for the intellectual stimulus that the Count offered and too taken with his wit and ebullience to resent the lessons in court etiquette. The world was larger than New England, and one must learn to live in it. He suppressed his impatience and listened dutifully to his new friend.

The arrival of agents of the new Shelburne ministry in Paris to confer with the peace commissioners shifted the center of attention from Holland to Paris. The principal role there fell naturally to Franklin. When Richard Oswald, purporting to speak for Shelburne, approached Franklin, the American minister took him to Vergennes. Vergennes gave his approval to their informal discussions, and Oswald departed to get fresh instructions. Franklin informed Adams of the interview, and Adams grumbled that it was undignified and improper for Franklin and Vergennes to receive "any agent about peace, who had not a commission and full powers to treat with the United States of America." This business of sneaking up backstairs, so to speak, seemed to Adams a poor way to conduct diplomacy. "But [Franklin]," he wrote morosely to Jenings, "must make himself a man of consequence by piddling with men who had no title. But thus it is that men of great reputation may do as many weak things as they please, and to remark their mistakes is to envy them."[9]

If Adams had at first been inclined to take lightly the curtailment of his powers and the cancellation of his commission to negotiate a treaty of commerce with Great Britain, as time passed he felt increasing indignation. The old paranoid tendencies returned, stimulated by the frustrations and delays of his Dutch mission. Friends in Congress sent him hints that Franklin's dispatches had played a part in the decision of Congress to modify his powers, and all his suspicion and hostility toward the Pennsylvanian flared forth. The fact that Franklin had sided with Vergennes against him rankled. He reviewed old slights and setbacks, brooded over Franklin's immorality and retraced his own relations with Vergennes, which he was convinced had been prejudiced by Franklin. The strange course of the peace soundings—they could not be called negotiations—increased his irritation. Jay, who had joined Franklin in Paris, shared and augmented Adams' suspicions and animosity toward Vergennes and Franklin. John became convinced more than ever that Franklin was the plaint tool of French policy. "As far as cruel fate shall compel me to act with him in public affairs, I shall treat him with decency and perfect impartiality," he wrote Jenings. "Further than that I can feel for him no other sentiment than contempt or abhorrence." Jenings did all he could to encourage Adams' suspicions. "Indeed," the ex-Marylander wrote, "Your Excellency must watch his conduct for the good of your country. He is capable of doing much mischief." Arthur Lee did his bit by writing Adams that Livingston, the newly appointed Secretary of Foreign Affairs, was "as devoted a partisan of Count Vergennes and Dr. Franklin as any that exists," quite under the thumb of Luzerne and Marbois. The instructions which had made Adams subject to the direction of Vergennes, Lee asserted, "give great offense and uneasiness to many in Congress; and to no one more than to myself. I think it most dishonorable and dangerous. It is a surrender of our independence and sovereignty and an acknowledgment that we are unequal to either."[10]

There was more than the color of truth in Lee's allegations. Luzerne, at least, considered Livingston his man, and Livingston in turn was grateful to the French minister and employed a Frenchman as his secretary. Adams thus had reason to feel hemmed in and isolated.

Thus when Livingston wrote that "France is interested with us in procuring a public acknowledgment of our independence," Adams replied with a lesson on international power politics. It was no area, he pointed out, for sentimental illusions and wishful thinking. History made it clear that "in cases of alliance between two unequal powers almost all the advantages ever did and ever will accrue to the greatest." This was simply common sense. It was pointless to indict France for trying to control the alliance and it was naïve to think that France would be governed in her actions by the best interests of America. It was the part of wisdom to protect the United States in every way possible while keeping faith with France and maintaining the most open and friendly relations with her.

"It is impossible for me to prove," he wrote, "that [the] delay of Spain to acknowledge our independence has been concerted between the French and Spanish ministry"; on the other hand, it would be foolishly trusting to overlook the possibility. For his part Adams had no doubt that it was true, nor was he disposed to censure France for it. The important thing was to take a realistic view of the matter and base American policy not on instructions from Vergennes but on a cool appraisal of how America's interests could best be served consistent with the letter and the spirit of the alliance. Any other basis was a false and a dangerous one, one which moreover might well leave the United States entangled for decades in European squabbles.

All Adams asked of Livingston was that he "insist upon seeing with your own eyes, using your own judgment and acting an independent part." Independence must be the guide line. The letter showed clearly that if Franklin was a far more subtle and successful, one might say "pragmatic," diplomat, Adams saw much more clearly than the Pennsylvanian the broad requirements of American policy. Franklin was astute enough but he was too lazy and had perhaps lived too long to push himself to the kind of relentless rumination that his fellow peace commissioner applied to all issues, great and small, that came within his purview. If Franklin was the more skilled practitioner of diplomacy, Adams was the profounder student.

In Adams' Dutch treaty negotiations there was an unexpected embarrassment. Shelburne, as a manifest of good intent, released Henry Laurens from his imprisonment in the Tower of London. Laurens immediately made plans to travel to The Hague to offer his services to Adams "in the business originally charged upon me by Congress." Adams, when he heard of Laurens' release, suppressed whatever feelings he may have had and wrote promptly expressing a "hearty desire" to enlist him in the work of his mission; indeed, he instructed Jenings to tell Laurens when he arrived in Brussels that if the South Carolinian would accept "this mission I will resign it in a moment."[11]

But the belated appearance of the intercepted envoy nonetheless created an awkward situation. Laurens' commission predated that of Adams. Adams had gone to the Netherlands to carry out the Carolinian's mission until such time as he should be released and make his way to The Hague; he had labored long and hard to win recognition, to bring about a treaty of commerce and negotiate a loan. Laurens' presence would in fact be most embarrassing. Must Adams step aside and defer to Laurens on all decisions, or would the two men operate as "co-ministers?" Despite Adams' cordiality, Laurens sensed a certain uneasiness and apprehension. The assurances that he would welcome Laurens' help sounded empty, and his account of the status of the treaty and the loan gave Laurens the feeling that he would definitely be in Adams' way if he remained in the Netherlands. "I conclude," Laurens wrote Livingston, "he thinks my attention is not requisite, and that it could only be productive of unnecessary expense to the public." Adams had written asking to be relieved so that he could return to Braintree and to his own fireside. But when Laurens appeared and presented him with an opportunity to make a graceful exit, he found himself too deeply involved, too jealous of his office and his powers to relinquish them. Laurens, who had no inclination to force himself upon Adams, departed for southern France and left the New Englander in possession of the field.

There was actually little to do at The Hague except wait for the States-General to conclude the treaty. Since Adams was bound to fret over something, he fretted over the peace discussions going forward in Paris. Although he was reassured by the presence of Jay, who kept him informed of the progress of negotiation, he distrusted Franklin and Vergennes. "I think we ought not to treat at all," he wrote Jay, "until we see a minister authorized to treat with 'the United States of America' or with their ministers. Our country will feel the miserable consequence of a different conduct if we are betrayed into negotiations, in or out of a congress, before this point is settled; if gold and diamonds and every insidious intrigue and wicked falsehood can induce anybody to embarrass us and betray us into truces and bad conditions, we may depend upon having them played off against us. We are, and can be, no match for them at this game."[12]

Troubled by the accounts of backstairs diplomacy that reached him from Paris, Adams revived a project that he had had in mind for some time. Although he had opposed the plan of a general peace conference presided over by the imperial powers when Vergennes suggested it, he felt that the time was ripe for such an effort; this time a conference in which the United States would have its seat as an equal among the European nations. He wrote to Franklin suggesting that the States-General of the Netherlands be requested to suggest to Russia and Austria that they recognize the United States as a member of the armed neutrality, thereby formally acknowledging American independence, and then invite Congress to send a representative to a conference which, under the mediation of Russia and Austria, would work out the details of an effective peace between the belligerent nations. Such a plan would avoid the dubious diplomacy that England had undertaken in an apparent effort to drive a wedge between the allies. It would bring peace and the acceptance of those maritime principles which the United States, in common with most of the neutral nations, wished to promote. In addition to writing to Franklin, Adams had the project for a general peace conference printed in Luzac's *Gazette* and urged Jenings to have it published in English papers so that it might be brought to the attention of the ministry.

Having arranged for publication of his grandiose plan, Adams sent letters to the editors of the various papers which had printed the scheme, vigorously supporting it. "The case of America is a new one," he wrote. "It has no example in history." The country was large enough, with enough people and natural resources, to become a great nation. "The continent of America," he announced in one such epistle, "is capable of feeding, clothing and subsisting, if the forests were cleared up, a hundred million people without diminishing one inhabitant of Europe." Such a nation, before many decades, would be able to benefit every country in Europe. The northern powers—the neutral nations—should recognize this fact and by their support of American independence seek to win the friendship and confidence of the new nation.[18]

It was an idea Adams reverted to often—the growth of America. The expansion of the United States, bursting all bounds, would at the same time redeem all errors. America was a great new force in the world, spreading, pushing out across an unimaginable wilderness, retrieving all mistakes by the simple, staggering fact of its growth; seeing the wrangles of diplomats, the artful maneuvers of ministers, the fiats of kings and emperors somehow shrink to insignificance beside the almost incomprehensible reality of this great new fact—the United States of America. He dampened his impatience and soothed his abraided nerves with thoughts of his country's extraordinary future.

The courts of Europe went on in the worn grooves of custom and tradition, playing the ancient game with the same familiar marked cards, secure, complacent, condescending where they bothered to take notice at all. "My imagination," Adams wrote Abigail, "has been warmed and my heart inflamed by the contemplation of that vast scene which is opening in the West, so that I am not much affected with measures that appear wrong to me at present. . . . We have nothing to do but march intrepidly on." The future was on the side of America. He could see a grand image of Americans as large as mountains "with a hundred yoke of oxen on a string, dragging a pine stick through swamps and stumps, never stop [ping] for an ox that stumbles and breaks a leg or his neck. They drag the lame or the dead along as if nothing had happened. They don't even stop to flog a vicious ox who kicks or gores but rather spirit up the rest of the team to force him into his place in order for his preservation."

Such, for Adams, was the symbol of the march westward, enormous, implacable, a vast tide that turned aside for nothing, cut the dead from the traces, bore the weak and rebellious by sheer momentum across rivers and plains and mountains, breaking the soil with plows the size of giant pines. But Europe had no inkling of all this, and Adams, try as he might, could not make the powers and potentates of that ancient land see the vision that he saw.

More specifically, the neutral powers would have none of Adams' ambitious scheme. Catherine and the Emperor were too limited in their views and Catherine, at least, too unsympathetic to American independence to be responsive. In addition Vergennes was opposed to any such plan because it would have made the United States less dependent upon the good offices, and thus less under the control, of France.

We get an engaging picture of the American ambassador at The Hague from a young American traveling in the Netherlands. Elkanah Watson, a neighbor from Plymouth, visited Adams at the Hôtel des Etats-Unis and was conducted by him on a tour of the surrounding countryside—along the tree-lined road to the fishing town of Scheveningen on the North Sea where Adams in his ambassador's uniform, the same uniform as a Continental officer, was recognized and hailed as he rode by. Stopping off at the celebrated gardens of the Count de Bentinck, "distinguished from other gardens in the province by style, simplicity and picturesque views," they strolled through the orangery, past the grottoes and water spouts, the miniature forest lake and hills, the terraced walk and the menagerie. The next day Adams took his compatriot on a tour to La Maison du Bois, built by the widow of Prince Henry Frederick, and afterward they walked through a forest whose "lofty oaks, growing promiscuously together, revived" in Watson's mind "lively recollections of American scenery."

Returning from a visit to Delft, Adams saw a child struggling in the canal. He ran forward to attempt its rescue, but Watson, seeing that a farm boy was already in the water nearby, restrained John from leaping into the canal fully clothed. Adams himself never mentioned the incident but it made a deep impression on Watson—the stout, middle-aged ambassador running toward the canal to save the drowning child.

It was obvious that Adams took a special fancy to his visitor; and Watson, for his part, was flattered by the interest of the older man. "The talents of Mr. Adams and the stern *republican* simplicity of his character gave him a powerful and peculiar influence in the government at The Hague," he concluded. Yet Watson found the ambassador often withdrawn and reserved; there were long and for the younger man sometimes painful silences. He recalled one occasion after dinner when the servants had left the room and his host seemed completely abstracted, quite unconscious of Watson's presence, staring at the table until the unhappy guest was about to excuse himself and withdraw. Suddenly Adams' face brightened and he announced: "Yes, it must be so; *twelve sail of the line supported by a proportion of frigates.* When America, my friend, shall possess such a fleet, she may bid defiance upon her own coast to any naval power in Europe."[14]

XXXVIII

At Braintree, Abigail's anxieties were increased by the long intervals without news from John. Three successive packets of letters were lost and in consequence no word from him reached America for almost a year. She wrote to John and the boys and, a little archly as always, to Thaxter, chiding him for not telling her more of his travels and inquiring whether he found European ladies more to his liking than those of Braintree. He must observe the great world around him and educate his homebound friend. Nations, Abigail wrote, "are ever changing for the better or the worse and will supply something new in science, arts or arms to a critical observer." She missed John hourly. In the land of liberty everyone seemed to think he had "a better right to our husbands than their partners. O! for absolute power," she exclaimed. "I would soon be mistress of mine. I am apprehensive for his health in Holland."[1]

She reminded Thaxter of the "wild and native beauties of America, where the free soul looks down to pity kings." Here love flourished too. "The conjugal union" was nowhere considered in "a more solemn and sacred light or adhered to with stricter fidelity." With property so equally distributed, without rank or precedence, "heart for heart is the only barter known; the affections have full scope; decorum alone is necessary." "Matrimony," she wrote him, "is not in vogue here. We have ladies but not a gentleman in the whole town." War had brought a general lowering of the standards of behavior. "Licentiousness and freedom of manners are predominant," she noted, adding, " 'Tis luxury, my dear sir, which ruins and depraves our manners. . . . It is much to be feared if the day of American simplicity and virtue are not already passed."[2]

When she wrote her husband in May her heart had awakened from the long night of winter and she exclaimed in a lyric outburst over "this beautiful month, when nature wears her gayest garb and animal and vegetable life is diffused on every side, when the cheerful hand of industry is laying a foundation for a plentiful harvest. . . . 'To feel the present Deity, and taste/The joy of God, to see a happy world.' " The scene recalled to her mind the words of Milton, beginning "'Sweet is the breath of morn'" and ending on the more solemn note, "'Nor grateful evening mild; nor silent Night/With this her solemn bird, nor walk by moon,/Or glittering starlight, *without thee is sweet.*'"[3]

Weeks stretched into months without word from her husband or son. In December of 1781 she wrote: "Two years, my dearest friend, have passed away since you left your native land. Will you not return ere the close of another year?" Abigail would purchase a retreat in the woods of Vermont and retire there with John far from "the vexations, toils and hazards of public life. Do you not," she asked, "sometimes sigh for such a seclusion? . . . 'An elegant sufficiency, content,/Retirement, rural quiet; friendship, books,/Ease and alternate labor; useful life,/Progressive virtue, and approving Heaven.'" Though many of Adams' friends talked of running him for Governor, Abigail felt no such ambition for him. "I know the voice of fame to be a mere weathercock, unstable as water and fleeting as a shadow. . . . Yet," she added in truth, "I have pride; I know I have a very large portion of it."[4]

Charles's arrival home in early July, the same rosy, handsome, charming child, as "perfectly attached to the modest republican style of life" as though he had never been exposed to the corrupting influences of the Old World, lightened her heart, but she worried constantly about the children's education. There was no school in the town and there had not been one for five years. She felt incapable of educating the three youngsters as they should be educated. They missed a father's guidance and example. She found a tutor for Charles but he soon quit to go into business for himself.

Nabby, an unusually pretty and graceful girl, was shy and reserved, somewhat of a mystery to her voluble and expressive mother. She promoted in her quiet way the idea of going to Holland to keep house for her father. "Nor would she make an ungraceful appearance at the head of your table," Abigail wrote proudly to John. She seemed to care little for what small social life Braintree and Boston offered. She would not even go to the Harvard commencement. "She has a stateliness in her manners which some misconstrue into pride and haughtiness," Abigail wrote John, "but which rather results from a too great reserve." If she had a shortcoming it was that "she wants more affability. . . . Her manners rather forbid all kinds of intimacy; and awe whilst they command." She was already several inches taller than Abigail, with the full figure of a woman.

Abigail, who had always been ruled by her heart and her emotions, was impressed with a certain spirit of calculation, of what she called "prudence," in Nabby. The girl held life at arms' length and surveyed it calmly and with a touch of shrewdness in her cool gray eyes. Abigail had cast herself upon life, full of ardor, indeed too full of "sensibility to be *very prudent*," she reminded John, recalling the passionate intensity of their courtship. Fortunately she had found a mate with an appetite for life as intense as her own.[5]

Abigail worried a good deal about John Quincy, so far from home and so exposed to the corruptions of the world. Even under the aegis of Francis Dana, he was bound to see and hear things that might be demoralizing to a boy with a simple provincial background. Of all the children, he was the most promising intellectually. Yet his impulsiveness made Abigail uneasy. She recognized in it her own and her husband's lack of prudence and moderation, qualities that had cost both of them much pain and unhappiness. The months and months that passed without word from him alarmed her. She wrote to chide him for not being a better correspondent. He was ever in her heart and mind. He must bend all his efforts toward becoming "a useful member of society, a friend to your country and a guardian of her laws and liberties." He must study the government, the customs and laws of the countries through which he traveled. He could not, she wrote him, "if you are capable of the reflection which I think you are, omit comparing the monarchial governments with the republican, to reflect upon the advantages and disadvantages rising from each, and to commit your thoughts to writing—to watch with attention the judgment and opinions of learned men whom you may hear conversing upon subjects of this nature—attend to the historians you read, and carefully observe the springs and causes that have produced the rise and fall of empires. . . . I do not expect the elegance of a Voltaire or the eloquence and precision of a Robinson," she wrote, only careful and accurate observation. The style would come later.[6]

She also busied herself with her little business enterprise. The articles that John sent her from France—"black and white gauzes and gauze handkerchiefs . . . low-priced linen, black calamanco, red tammies, fine threads, low-priced calicos, ribbons"—were put into the hands of friends who sold them for her on a commission basis.

In addition to the supplies to sell, Abigail asked John to send her five yards of "scarlet broadcloth of the best kind and three yards of satin of the same color which I want for my own use." She would blaze forth in defiant gaiety. Nabby would like a pair of paste shoe buckles. While he was getting them, Abigail added, "you may send a pair for me if you please." The idea of Nabby going to keep house for John at The Hague put the bee in Abigail's own bonnet. She would go too. She would dare the terrible ocean crossing and be at last with her husband after their long and cruel separation. "Instead of being more and more reconciled," she wrote, "every day makes it more painful to me." She could hardly bear to think of the fact that they had been apart almost three years and then to reflect that there was no end in sight.[7]

She broached the subject of joining John hesitantly, fearing a rebuff.

Her "very delicate proposal" was of "so tender a nature I could hardly bear a refusal," she wrote him, adding dutifully: "Yet should a refusal take place, I know it will be upon the best grounds and reason." She could not forbear in her loneliness to remind her husband that they also serve who only stand and wait. "All history and every age," she noted, "exhibit instances of patriotismic virtue in the female sex which, considering our situation, equals the most heroic of yours. . . . When you offer your blood to the state—it is ours—on giving it our sons and husbands we give more than ourselves—you can only die on the field of battle—but we have the misfortune to survive those whom we love the most."[8]

Abigail kept in touch with congressional politics through Lovell. As long as he remained in Congress he was her faithful correspondent. He wrote her of the change in Adams' instructions and of the revocation of his power to negotiate a commercial treaty with Great Britain, hinting that Franklin and Vergennes had combined forces against her husband. Abigail was alarmed and indignant. The resolve of Congress affecting John Adams' powers struck her "very disagreeably and is highly tinctured [with] Parisian influence. . . . I wish I had been sooner apprised of the design," she replied. She might then have been able to stir up some of Adams' friends in Congress and rally opposition to Luzerne and the French party. Adams, she warned Lovell, would not accept such limitations on his action. He would resign and return home rather than be hampered and humiliated. Abigail was especially surprised to learn that Luzerne had been the prime mover in the campaign to make John subservient to the French court. "He was no stranger when he left France," she informed Lovell, "to the views and character of Franklin." She had always supposed him a friend to her husband. As for John, his only crime was that he was too simple and honest a republican. Others feared his courage and integrity and were determined to crush him. Lovell must warn Adams and try to strengthen the resolution and independence of Congress. "Yet it wounds me, sir," she added poignantly; "when he is wounded I bleed."[9]

In the thin trickle of news, Abigail was delighted to hear that the tortuous negotiations with Holland had finally resulted in recognition of the United States, but her husband's triumph was not properly noticed or appreciated in America. He needed to have an experienced publicist working for him the way Franklin did, to explain and acclaim his accomplishments. Again she renewed her plea to be allowed to join him in Europe: "I cannot, O! I cannot be reconciled to living as I have done for three years past—I am serious. . . . May I? Will you let me try to soften, if I cannot wholly relieve you from, your burden of cares and perplexities? . . . I hardly think of enemies, of terrors and storms." She had an obligation to be with her husband and the considerations of the dangerous crossing or her own tenuous health were not enough to deter her. She had indeed no peace of mind or heart, "for waking or sleeping I am ever with you."[10]

As to the *nouveau riche,* the opportunists and profiteers in the neighborhood who had risen to wealth during the war, such social life as existed was in their vulgar and pretentious hands; Abigail preferred to have no part of it. She was ignored by the new elite—"I have not the *honor* to be known to many of them," she wrote icily. "The manners of our country," she told John, "are so entirely changed from what they were in those days of simplicity when you knew it that it has nothing of a republic but the name." The new elite was an aristocracy of money; good manners and good conversation were unknown to them—"unless you can keep a public table and equipage you are of but small consideration," Abigail observed. "What would you have thought fifteen years ago, for young practitioners at the bar to be setting up their chariots; to be purchasing—not paying for—their country seats. . . . Hogarth may exhibit his topsa turva," she added, "I am sure I have seen it realized."[11]

In the fall a young man appeared in Braintree who broke into the Adamses' quiet pattern of life. Royall Tyler was a recent graduate of Harvard who had a reputation for being fast. He had inherited money from his father and spent it in spectacular fashion. It was not that he was corrupt or depraved, that he had lived scandalously or been openly immoral. It was simply a disconcerting instability, a recklessness which delighted in pranks and wild gambols. Beneath the gaiety and high spirits a streak of morbidity and melancholy introspection occasionally thrust forth with an alarming intensity. But he was handsome, brilliant and charming. He secured introductions to Abigail and Nabby and was soon a constant visitor at the Adams house. Abigail was delighted with him. He brightened lonely hours with his witty and engaging talk. They discussed poems and novels, playwrights and philosophers, history and ethics. Better yet, he brought his own poems and sketches and read them to a most responsive audience; it was an intellectual feast for Abigail, who got little nourishment in provincial Braintree.

Tyler responded to Abigail as readily as she did to him. She was in her middle thirties, a most attractive woman. Short and inclined slightly to plumpness, she had an engaging vivacity, a face full of expressiveness and animation and the kind of wise and warm maturity that makes young women seem shallow and uninteresting by comparison. Moreover she had a masculine edge to her mind that made her especially appealing to intelligent men. So Tyler found himself in a sense suitor of both mother and daughter, hardly knowing which one drew him day after day to the farmhouse living room. Nabby, demure and beautiful, possessed with a sense of her own womanliness still new and extraordinary to her, sat and listened to the conversation fly back and forth and occasionally joined in. Tyler found her demureness and reserve most alluring. When she spoke in her low, rather precise way she did so with a thoughtfulness and a feminine grace that delighted him. They were in truth, mother and daughter, a duo that might turn any man's head. Tyler gave himself up completely to the pleasure of their company. He became the declared suitor of Nabby and Abigail was suddenly faced with the prospective consequences of their happy and congenial evenings. It was a rude jolt. Entertaining as Royall Tyler might be as a friend, as a gay and casual visitor, he was clearly unsuitable as a husband for her only daughter. If she could overlook some of young Tyler's shortcomings, she knew there was a sterner judge, thoroughly immune to his charm, who would take a dim view of such a romance.

Tyler, beside his shaky reputation, had no means of supporting a wife. He had studied law with Francis Dana but when his father's death put money into his hands he had dropped law to amuse himself by spending his inheritance. Instead of prudently investing in land, he had scattered it about where it gave pleasure to him and to others. As Abigail expressed it in a letter to John announcing Tyler's courtship, "His patrimony . . . has been his bane—for with a disposition naturally volatile and gay, an easy address, an agreeable person, he became the favorite of the gay and fair." Yet despite "all these temptations and allurements to vice, the world accused him not of more than gaiety and volubility." He had taken up his lodgings with Richard and Mary Cranch, Abigail's brother-in-law and sister, who reported that his habits had become sober and steady. He had laid out for himself a strict regimen of work and study, designed to prove his complete reformation. He had already, Abigail wrote, made many friends in the town by his bright and attractive manner; "exceedingly amiable," Abigail called him. It was clear to Abigail that Nabby was among those who had fallen under his spell.

That Abigail was the young man's advocate was plain enough from the tone of her letter, which pled his cause with some eloquence. Knowing John's fairness, she was confident that he would judge Tyler by his demonstrated merits rather than by rumors or by past errors that were the result of youth and inexperience. Yet she felt considerable uneasiness as she composed a letter to her husband informing him of the romance.[12]

XXXIX

By the seventeenth of September 1782 the Dutch treaty was ready for formal approval. It remained only to make five fair copies and to have it signed by two deputies of the province of Holland, and one from each of the other six provinces. Five months had passed since Adams had submitted a draft for consideration by their high mightinesses. He consoled himself with the thought that it had been necessary to proceed "with all the softness, caution and prudence possible, that no ill humors might be stirred."[1]

Finally, after further interminable delays, Adams was summoned to the State House for the formal ceremonies. He was received by the deputies from Holland and Zeeland and conducted into the truce chamber where the treaty was at last signed and sealed. The moment was opportune, for Adams had just received a letter from Jay informing him that Oswald had turned up in Paris with a commission to treat of a peace "with the commissioners of the United States." He wished Adams to hasten to Paris to join him and Franklin in pushing the negotiations to a conclusion. With the treaty signed and the loan filling, Adams was at last free to assume his alternate role as peace negotiator.

After signing the treaty Adams went around to the Duke de la Vauguyon's to give him the news and inform him that he would soon be leaving for Paris to join the peace commissioners. The Duke with a slight edge of raillery in his voice congratulated him. He was pleased that Adams and Jay saw eye to eye and he thought it "absolutely necessary" that Adams should hasten to the French capital, "for," as Adams recorded it later, ". . . the immovable firmness that Heaven had given me would be useful and necessary upon this occasion." Adams laughed aloud at the Duke's thrust, and replied with a wry smile, "I have often occasion enough, however, for cooler blood than has fallen to my share to regulate that same firmness."[2]

In addition to his call on the Duke, there were a number of ceremonial visits to make before his departure—the President of the States-General, Secretary Fagel, secretary to the Prince of Orange, the Grand Pensionary, and finally the Prince and Princess. He had a farewell chat with Count Sarsfield over breakfast, packed his papers, took a walk in the woods near his house, dined with the Duke de la Vauguyon and took time to write Abigail that he was setting off for Paris, as he told the Grand Pensionary, with "an olive branch in his mouth, in his heart and in his hand." The negotiations at Paris, he feared, would be "a troublesome business." Franklin was indisposed and suspected by Adams of being under French tutelage. "I don't know whether in future Job should be reckoned 'the patient man,'" he wrote: "it seems to me that I have had rather more trials than he and have got through them. I am now going to Paris, to another furnace of affliction. Yet I am very gay," he added, "more so than usual. I fear nothing. Why should I? I had liked to have said nothing worse can happen. But this is too much. Heaven has hitherto preserved my country and my family." He had taken time in the rush of preparations for his departure to buy Abigail the piece of scarlet satin—*croisee* the Dutch called it—she had asked for. He could not forbear to smile as he looked at it and thought of his Puritan wife tripping through Braintree like a small flame. He felt a stab of desire; a bone-deep ache of loneliness and love. The scarlet cloth seemed almost alive, startlingly gay, even wicked. It was in truth not as incongruous as it seemed, for Abigail was as vivid, as lively, as passionate as the cloth itself. "I have sent you a whole piece of most excellent and beautiful scarlet cloth," he wrote. "You never saw such a cloth. . . . It is very saucy!" That was to say, like Abigail herself. He sent in addition a handsome piece of blue cloth which she might make into suits for the boys or turn into riding hoods for herself and Nabby "in honor of the manufacturers of Haarlem." Her proposal to come to Europe would make him the happiest of men, but the future seemed too uncertain. He hoped that the treaty of peace with Britain would soon be concluded and he on his way home. "I never know how to close," he added, "because I can never express the tenderness I feel."[3]

The Dutch treaty seemed to John the triumph of his long and laborious campaign and the vindication of his "militia" diplomacy. Writing to Dana, he reminded him of the web which Vergennes had attempted to weave around him. "I broke through it as the whale goes through a net. . . . If I had transmitted to Congress the advice and exhortations and remonstrances I received [through the Duke de la Vauguyon] and asked their instructions, I should have been forbidden to stir, and should have been sprawling here with hands and feet in the air pegged like Ariel in a rifted oak. This Republic would at this moment have been separately at peace and American independence would never have been acknowledged by any power in Europe except France, until England should have done it."[4]

To Adams the principal virtue of the treaty was that by it the United States had established a pattern of friendship without involvement. The other powers of Europe would in time settle for American friendship "and will choose to excuse us from meddling in future wars." "This," he wrote Abigail, "is the object of all my wishes and the end of all my politics. To this end and for this reason I look upon my success in Holland as the happiest event and the greatest action of my life, past or future. I think that no opportunity will present itself for a century to come for striking a stroke so critical and [of] so extensive importance, in the political system of America." How critical it had been few persons knew. "It was hung upon a thread, a hair, a silken fiber. . . . A future war in Europe will show the importance of the American negotiation in Holland."[5] "When I go to heaven," he declared in another letter to Dana, "I shall look down over the battlements with pleasure upon the Stripes and Stars wantoning in the wind at The Hague. There is another triumph in the case sweeter than that over our enemies. You know my meaning. It is the triumph of stubborn independence. Independence of friends and foes." The French were afraid of such independence.[6]

"The artifices of the devil will be used to get me out of the commission for peace," he wrote Abigail. "If they succeed I abandon Europe forever for the Blue Hills without one instant's loss of time or even waiting leave to return. For whoever is horse-jockeyed, I will not be." Vergennes, in Adams' view, meant "to keep his hand under our chin to prevent us from drowning, but not to lift our heads out of the water."[7]

On Thursday, October 17, Adams set off at last for Paris in a rented coach with John Thaxter and Charles Storer as his traveling companions. The little party dined at Haarlem and had tea at Amsterdam. From Amsterdam the coach rolled along through level country laced with canals, past Massen and Suylem, the latter a town of brick kilns, to Utrecht where they put up at the new tavern, the Castle of Antwerp. At Utrecht, Adams was fascinated by the cellars that ran under the streets to the grand canal, so that houses facing the canal could be entered from the canal itself through doors in the banks.

From Utrecht they drove on through muddy roads to Breda. The gates of that city were shut at six-thirty and Adams had to send his servant ahead on horseback to apply to the Governor of the city to be admitted after the closing of the gates. When they arrived at nine o'clock, tired and travel-stained, they found an officer and a guard at the gate to admit "Mr. Adams, the ambassador of America."

To Antwerp was only ten leagues but the coach took a day to make the trip over sandy roads. Adams and his party put up at the Grand Laboureur opposite a handsome church with a statue of the prophet Elias on its façade and John lingered long enough to indulge himself in the city's art treasures. He went to the cathedral to see Rubens' great altarpieces, the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and the Descent of Jesus from the Cross. "The figures and coloring," he wrote, "are beautiful beyond description."

In the Descent from the Cross, Rubens had painted among the spectators the likeness of himself. Each trade, Adams noted, had its own altar; the martyrdom of St. Crispin, for example, was represented at the altar of the shoemakers.[8]

From the cathedral Adams went with his young companions to Rubens' tomb at the Church of St. James and then to several private collections which included a Magdalene by Veronese, a man and wife by Rembrandt and several paintings by Van Dyck. Of them all Adams was most struck by a Rembrandt portrait of the artist's mother.

The next stop was Brussels where their coach again arrived after the city gates had been shut for the night, but the porter took Adams' name and dispatched a messenger to the burgomaster, who sent word back promptly that the American minister should be admitted. At Brussels, Adams conferred with his faithful correspondent, Edmund Jenings, and with William Lee. Jenings gave Adams a sketch of one of the British negotiators, Fitzherbert, a young man of thirty-three. "His parts are quick and his education has been good . . . but [he is] conceited and assuming," Jenings reported.[9]

Pushing on from Brussels, Adams took note of the contrast between the neatness and order of the villages of Holland and those of Brabant, through which their carriage was passing. Before they reached Halle, the iron axletree of their coach snapped and the three travelers were dumped unceremoniously in the middle of the road. They dismounted and the horses dragged the crippled vehicle to the nearest tavern. After the carriage was repaired they "rode to Mons, in a great rain," and there dined at the Couronne de l'Empereur, "very well and very cheap." On the road to Valenciennes the axletree gave way once more and they went sight-seeing while their coachman procured a new one. Adams was not impressed with what they saw: "the streets very foul. The houses very dirty, the doors and windows broken, bricks and glass wanting. The people, men, women and children, filthy and ragged."[10]

At Cambrai, the seat of bishops, John with Thaxter and Charles Storer visited the tomb of Bishop Fénelon, famous prophet of the Enlightenment, and saw at the cathedral "a curious piece of clockwork" which when put in motion carried the figure of Christ through the seven stages of the Cross.

So over wretched, muddy roads through a dreary rain, they progressed out of the lowlands into the gentle hills of Oise. At Chantilly they stopped to visit the race track and stables; Adams, presented with a whipstick by one of the grooms, calculated carefully and precisely what size tip to give the fellow. From the race track they walked to the famous château, somewhat dilapidated but nonetheless impressive, through the gardens, past fishponds, grottoes, and fountains, watching the flotillas of imperial swans that forgot their dignity to scramble for the bread that Thaxter and Storer scattered for them. Carp, too, came at a whistle to be fed: enormous, golden, "fat as butter," whiskered and regal, hundreds of them, crowding up to the margins of the pond until the smaller fish were lifted out of the water and flapped about on the backs of those beneath them. "Some of them . . . thrust up their mouths to the surface" and gaped at the visitors "like young birds in a nest to their parents for food," John noted.

While they were viewing the bronze equestrian statues of the Grand Constable Montmorency, the great General Philip Augustus and Louis VIII, Mademoiselle de Bourbon came out onto the round balcony at the corner of the château like a beautiful vision dressed in white, her hair flowing over her shoulders, a book in her hand. Adams stared at the lady, entranced, until she became aware of his warm gaze and "rose up with that majesty and grace which persons of birth affect . . . turned her hair off both her shoulders with her hands . . . and . . . stepped back into the chamber." The spell was broken. John rejoined his companions with the feeling that he had, for a moment, been a prince in an enchanted garden.[11]

At the tavern in Chantilly they ate an early cutlet and drank a glass of wine. Thus fortified, they set out on the last leg of their journey and arrived in very good season at the Hôtel de Valois, Rue de Richelieu, where to Adams' annoyance they found the hotel so full that they had to be satisfied with very indifferent accommodations.

Adams' first act in Paris was to take a much-needed bath at the bathhouse on the Seine opposite the Tuileries. He was ushered by an attendant into a little room with a large glass window overlooking the park. There he was provided with a table, a mirror, two chairs and a supply of hot towels to scrub away the grime of his journey. After his ablutions he sent for a tailor, a wigmaker and a shoemaker to equip him properly for his appearance at the court. He grumbled at doing so. The city had established "such a domination over the fashion that neither clothes, wigs, nor shoes, made any other place, will do in Paris." It was the means, indeed, by which Paris levied a tax on the rest of the world, setting the mode and making Europe observe it. "Paris furnishes the materials and the manner," he wrote, "both to men and women everywhere else."[12]

Adams found that Franklin had recovered so far from his painful gout as to be able to sit at the table and that he and Jay were divided over the question of whether the latter should try to open negotiations with Spain in the absence of a proper commission for the Spanish ambassador, the Count de Aranda. The French ministry, moreover, was involved in a wrangle that saw De Castries, Minister of Marine, opposed to Fleury, the Comptroller, with the Queen supporting the Minister of Marine and Vergennes cautiously placing his weight behind the Comptroller. There was even talk of a change of Foreign Ministers, with Choiseul and Necker mentioned as the leading candidates.

The death of Rockingham in the spring and the succession of Shelburne to the office of Prime Minister had eliminated Fox, who resigned. Shelburne had reorganized the Cabinet and taken the negotiations into his own hands. In the interim between Shelburne's assumption of office and his active direction of the negotiations Franklin and Oswald carried on informal conversations about the terms of a peace treaty. The essential articles, Franklin had informed Oswald, were, first, the recognition of independence, "full and complete"; then a settlement of boundaries between the United States and "the loyal colonies," and freedom of fishing on the banks of Newfoundland and elsewhere. Oddly, in Oswald's view, Franklin said nothing about the right of "drying fish on the shore at Newfoundland," a right important to the New England fisheries.

These were the necessary articles. The "advisable" articles included indemnification for the destruction of American towns caused by the British, "some sort of acknowledgement" by Parliament of the British wrongdoing; equal trade privileges with British ships and goods; and, finally, the cession of Canada to the United States.

Soon after this conversation Franklin had second thoughts on the matter of independence and notified Oswald that recognition of independence by the British must precede the formal treaty rather than simply constitute the first article. When Jay joined Franklin he associated himself, partly perhaps as a result of Adams' injunctions from The Hague, with the position that the recognition, in one form or another, must be a precondition of actual negotiation of a treaty.

While the Americans haggled with Oswald over this issue, Jay entered into informal discussions with Aranda, the Spanish ambassador to Versailles, over the western and southern boundaries between the United States and the Spanish territories of Louisiana and West Florida. Aranda was disconcerted by Jay's insistence on the Mississippi River as the western boundary, running as far south as the thirty-first degree of latitude. The Spanish ambassador claimed the east bank of the Mississippi as far north as the Great Lakes and a more northerly latitude as the boundary of West Florida.

Aranda, finding Jay intractable, appealed to Vergennes to support the Spanish position. The delay in the negotiations between Britain and the United States provided an opportunity for the interjection of the Spanish claims. It was a complication, moreover, which Spain was anxious to exploit as a means of keeping the United States in the war until Spain had made good its intention of seizing Gibraltar from the British. Caught between Spanish and American demands, Vergennes showed an inclination to favor the Spanish and Rayneval, acting as an emissary of Vergennes, indicated as much to Shelburne. Rumors of Rayneval's mission served to augment Jay's suspicions of French motives. He and Franklin thus decided to give way on the issue of British recognition of American independence to the extent of accepting Oswald's instructions to treat with the "commissioners of the United States" as *de facto* recognition of independence. This Shelburne agreed to, Oswald's commission was altered, and the way was opened for actual treaty negotiations to take place.

On October 5, Jay presented the British with a draft which, in addition to Franklin's "necessary articles," contained an additional paragraph making clear America's claim to the Mississippi River. The draft arrived in England shortly after the word that the Spanish attack on Gibraltar had been smashed. The delay in negotiations occasioned by the contention over British recognition of independence had strengthened the British hand considerably. Shelburne was encouraged to direct Oswald to make a strong fight for additional articles in the treaty, indemnifying the loyalists for confiscated property and guaranteeing the payment of debts owed to British creditors by American merchants. Such was, in brief, the state of negotiations when Adams joined Jay and Franklin in Paris in late October.

Adams called on Jay at once and, although the New Yorker complained of his bad health and the load of work that fell upon him without a clerk, Adams found him firm on the important issues of peace. Franklin, John felt, would try to drive a wedge between Jay and himself; "to this end," he wrote, "he will provoke, he will insinuate, he will intrigue, he will maneuver. My curiosity will at least be employed in observing his invention and his artifice."

From his conversation with Jay, Adams rode to Passy to visit Franklin. The meeting went off much better than Adams had expected. The two men, however much they disliked each other, had a higher regard for their country than for their own feelings. If they must pull in harness they were both determined to do so with good spirit. Franklin was urbane enough to take such a position quite naturally. He had the born diplomat's talent for dissimulation. For Adams, who wore his heart on his sleeve, it was much more difficult but he imposed a strict discipline on himself, and he came away from the meeting convinced that the doctor was prepared to make common cause with his fellow commissioners.

Soon after his arrival in Paris, Adams encountered for the first time the obnoxious instruction to the commissioners of April 1781—"ultimately to govern yourselves by the advice and opinion of the French ministry." He shared Jay's indignation when he read it. It was fortunate that it had not come sooner to Adams' hand because it confirmed all his suspicions about French policy and would undoubtedly have stirred him to vigorous protest. Indeed, as soon as he read the instructions he wrote to Livingston. Some people at Paris had put a construction on the article which would take from the commissioners "all right of judging for ourselves," he declared, and oblige them "to agree to whatever the French ministers should advise us to, and to do nothing without their consent." If that was in fact the intent of the instruction, Adams declared, "I hereby resign my place in the commission, and request that another person may be immediately appointed in my stead."[13]

He and Jay had insisted upon recognition of American independence as a preliminary to all discussions. "The advice of the Count de Vergennes has been contrary; but, however great a minister he may be in his own department, his knowledge is insufficient and his judgment too often erroneous in our affairs to be an American minister." In addition, Adams gave Livingston another sharp rap on the knuckles. "You will, I am sure, not take it amiss if I say that it is indispensably necessary for the service of Congress and the honor of [your] office that it be kept impenetrably secret from the French in many things. The office will be an engine for the ruin of the reputation of your ministers abroad, and for injuring our cause in material points, the fishery, the Western lands, and the Mississippi, etc., if it is not."[14]

Adams could hardly have been more blunt. He discovered happily that Franklin and Jay were as inclined as he to consider the instructions improper and ignore them. "Mr. Jay as well as Mr. Franklin and myself," he wrote his friend Henry Jackson, "are exceedingly embarrassed by some of our instructions." No man, he added, had a higher sense of the obligation of instructions than he did. It was "a point of duty to observe them." But the effect was that since it was impossible to communicate with Congress the commissioners were bound hand and foot if their instructions were to be taken literally. "Whole systems of policy appear in a striking light, which were not suspected—yet the time passes, all Europe waits, and we must act." The only solution possible for rational men in such circumstances was "to construe instructions as we do all other precepts and maxims, by such limitations, restrictions and exceptions as reason, necessity and the nature of things point out."[15]

Franklin and Jay, as we have seen, had been carrying on conversations with Richard Oswald about the terms of the peace treaty since the middle of September (Adams arrived in Paris on October 26). At the end of October the rather pliant Oswald was joined by Henry Strachey, a much stronger character—Adams called him "as artful and insinuating a man as they could send"; and noted, "he pushes and presses every point as far as it can possibly go; he has the most eager, earnest, pointed spirit."

Before Adams joined in the discussions he was briefed by Jay and Franklin on the progress of negotiations. Jay, indeed, sought Adams out at the Hôtel de Valois to discuss strategy and John was disconcerted at the strength of the New Yorker's anti-French prejudices. "Mr. Jay," he wrote, "likes Frenchmen as little as Mr. Lee and Mr. Izard did," which was certainly very little. To Jay they were simply not a "moral people." "He don't like any Frenchman," Adams added, even the Marquis de Lafayette, whom he conceded to be able and clever. This was carrying things rather too far, Adams thought. In the face of such narrow and stony provincialism, he found himself defending the French vigorously. To the rumors which Jay poured in his ear—that Vergennes was plotting with the British to rob the United States of the fisheries, the Western lands and the navigation of the Mississippi (even, one rumor said, to divide America between France and England)—Adams replied a little stiffly, "These whispers ought not to be credited by us." There was, on the one hand, a proper caution and independence, and on the other a degree of suspicion and hostility which might divide the allies and ultimately wreck the peace negotiations.[16]

When Adams took his place with the negotiators Strachey promptly introduced the matter of payment of debts owed by Americans before the war to British merchants. The treaty must include a provision for the recovery of such debts. Franklin replied that neither the commissioners nor Congress could commit the states on this point. While the answer was technically true it seemed to Adams a poor one. It was an admission of weakness and ineptitude, a confession that there was no general body of law in the new United States, but rather that Congress was at the mercy of the individual states comprising the union. He broke in sharply, saying he thought the point not inadmissible; he certainly had no intention of cheating anyone. Strachey could not suppress a smile. His own instructions were clear on the issue. He had feared that a failure to agree might imperil the whole negotiation.

After the session was over Adams pointed out to Jay and Franklin that while it was true Congress could not bind the states to such a provision it was certainly in its power to recommend to the states that they open their courts to British creditors for the recovery of legitimate debts. Such a position would satisfy Shelburne by allowing him to appear as champion of the merchants. Nor, in Adams' view, was the compliance of the commissioners hypocritical. Just debts should be recovered. Americans had no right to use the war as a subterfuge to evade obligations made in good faith. Jay and Franklin, Adams noted, "gradually fell into this opinion," and the sop was thus offered to the Englishmen, who seemed "much pleased."

The next thorny issue was the matter of compensation to the Tories for property seized by the American patriots. On this the American commissioners presented a united front, although Adams confessed to his friend Henry Jackson that, left to his own devices, he "would compensate the wretches, how little soever they deserve it."[17] "We cannot stipulate for such compensation," the commissioners declared in a joint note to Oswald and Strachey, "unless on your part it be agreed to make retribution to our citizens for the heavy losses they have sustained by the unnecessary destruction of private property. . . . We should be sorry if the absolute impossibility of our complying further with your propositions should induce Great Britain to continue the war for the sake of those who caused and prolonged it." Strachey promptly fired back an equally emphatic note. Provision for the refugees, he insisted, was a condition of continuing the treaty discussions. It affected equally, he concluded, "the honor and humanity of your country and of ours."[18]

The ensuing days were taken up in lengthy disputations about the fate of the Tories. Oswald visited Franklin, Adams and Jay in turn, trying to wring from one or the other of them some hint of concessions. But all three stood firm and repeated the now familiar arguments. Undoubtedly aware that Adams had a number of close friends among the Tories in England and professed a sympathy for their "sorrows and sufferings," Oswald concentrated his efforts on the New Englander. "He began to use arguments with me to relax," Adams wrote of one of their meetings. "I told him he must not think of that, but must bend all his thoughts to convince and persuade his court to give it up." If Oswald could not come to an agreement with the present commissioners, Adams warned him, they would break off the negotiations. In such an event Congress would doubtless send new commissioners more amenable to the control of Vergennes, men who would do exactly as the French court wished them to do.

The American commissioners, in any event, Oswald said, would receive from the King of France the traditional gold snuffboxes set with diamonds and the King's portrait. Adams ventured to doubt such marks of royal favor for himself. "I have dealt too freely with this court," he told Oswald; "I [have] not concealed from them any useful and necessary truth, although it was disagreeable. Indeed I neither expected or desired any favors from them nor would I accept any. I should not refuse any customary compliment of that sort, but it never had nor would be offered me." Adams' most telling point was that America and England were nations with a common background and common interests. Any treaty between the two should be designed to restore harmony and mutual confidence as rapidly as possible.

"You are afraid," Oswald said, "of being made tools of the powers of Europe."

"Indeed I am," Adams replied.

"What powers?"

"All of them. It is obvious that all the powers of Europe will be continually maneuvering with us to work us into their real or imaginary balances of power. They will all wish to make us a makeweight candle when they are weighing out their pounds. . . . But I think it ought to be our rule not to meddle. . . ."

"I beg of you," Oswald answered, "to get out of your head the idea that we shall disturb you."

"Thank you for your will. . . . But nations don't feel as you and I do; and your nation, when it gets a little refreshed from the fatigues of the war, when men and money become plentiful, and allies at hand, will not feel as it does now."

"We can never be such damned sots as to think of differing again with you."

"Why, in truth I have never been able to comprehend the reason why you ever thought of differing with us," Adams replied, and here the conversation ended.[19]

From Lafayette, Adams received word that Vergennes was affronted that he had not called on him upon his return to Paris, so he rode out to Versailles the next day to request an audience with the Count. The Frenchman received him affably enough and questioned him closely on the progress of negotiations with the British commissioners. The Americans and British differed on two points only, Adams said—the northern boundary of Maine and the treatment of the Tories. The Count was not surprised that England insisted on compensation for the Tories, all precedents were in favor of it; history gave no instance of a similar conflict, terminated by treaty, where those who had adhered to the old government had not received back their former possessions. Rayneval backed up his master and Adams in rebuttal cited the case of Ireland; Vergennes answered that the cases were not comparable, but Adams persisted. The Tories "by their misrepresentations had deceived the nation . . . and now that very nation was thought to be bound in honor to compensate its dishonorers and destroyers." The meeting however went off agreeably enough and the Count asked Adams to dine. The guests included the Marquis de Lafayette and the usual company of court figures.

In the drawing room before dinner a number of the company came up to Adams to offer congratulations upon his successful negotiations in Holland. He tucked each compliment away carefully in his mind: "Sir, by my faith, you have succeeded marvelously well"; "You have brought about the recognition of your country's independence"; "There's perfect success"; "You have accomplished marvels in Holland. You have outmaneuvered the Stadtholder and separated the English; you have given momentum to a movement, you have stirred up the whole world." Finally, and most cherished of all, "*Monsieur, vous êtes le Washington de la négociation.*" "This is the finishing stroke," he wrote after recording the words in his diary. "It is impossible to exceed this!" Then to sober himself a little, he noted: "Compliments are the study of this people, and there is no other so ingenious at them. . . . A few of these compliments would kill Franklin if they should come to his ears."

Adams was pleased with the notice given him by the Count and his wife. He offered his arm to the Countess to conduct her to the table and, he wrote, she "gave me her hand with extraordinary condescension." She indicated that he should sit on her right "and was remarkably attentive to me the whole time." The Count, who sat opposite and who could be as charming as he could be abrupt, played the same game, inquiring most solicitously what dishes Adams would like, offering him *petits gateaux*, and charging his wineglasses with claret, madeira and burgundy. Adams was immensely flattered by courtesies paid him. "In short," he noted in his diary, "I was never treated with half the respect at Versailles in my life."[20]

Coming from his astute enemy, the attentions were a measure of Adams' success in pursuing his "independent" line. Clearly Vergennes identified him as the principal stumbling block in the way of French objectives and sought belatedly to accomplish with blandishments what he had not been able to achieve through his diplomatic maneuverings. For four years Adams had been a thorn in the side of the French minister. It seemed that everywhere he turned he encountered the contentious, intractable little man squarely across his path, exhorting or reprimanding him, addressing him, the King's minister, in the tones of a schoolmaster with a backward pupil. A man as sophisticated as Vergennes must have balanced between amusement and irritation as he looked across the table at the flushed, round face, so woefully lacking, its possessor felt, in the proper mien of sternness and authority. He knew very well that Adams considered himself the principal if not the sole defender of America's interests in Europe, the antagonist of Vergennes himself. He had done his best to clip the umbrageous New Englander's wings and, he was forced to confess, had largely failed. Watching him now speaking animatedly with the Countess, warmed by the wine and good food, it may have occurred to him that he had used the wrong tactics. Perhaps he should have suppressed his dislike and cultivated the lawyer from Braintree.

Despite his almost childish pleasure in the compliments and courtesies paid him by the Count and his guests, Adams never wavered in his convictions. "America has been long enough involved in the wars of Europe," he wrote Livingston not long afterward. "She has been a football between contending nations from the beginning, and it is easy to foresee that France and England both will endeavor to involve us in their future wars. It is our interest and duty to avoid them as much as possible, and be completely independent, and to have nothing to do with either of them but in commerce. My poor thoughts and feeble efforts have been from the beginning constantly employed to arrange all our European connections to this end."[21]

Adams was convinced that the French had taken up the Tory cause because they wished to have a strong pro-British party in the United States which would force that nation, for its own protection against internal disorders, into the arms of France. In addition he suspected that Vergennes wished the issue of the Tories to be a sticking point between the English and Americans and so delay the negotiation of the treaty.

These suspicions were increased by word that Vergennes's secretary, Rayneval, was making frequent secret trips to England.

On November 20, Franklin visited Adams and the two men had a long talk that cleared the air and produced a new confidence in each other's principles if not each other's characters. Adams expressed at length his uneasiness at the disposition of a faction in Congress to abandon the Mississippi boundary and the fisheries and the encouragement that the French seemed to give to this group. Franklin heard him out, did not try to exonerate Vergennes, and agreed wholeheartedly that the commissioners should stand firm on these points. After his conversation with Franklin, Adams walked to Jay's house and reviewed with him the political situation in Europe and its probable effect on the peace negotiations. The American commissioners, with things very much up in the air in England and the Shelburne ministry clinging to power by the skin of its teeth, had an excellent opportunity to exert some influence on the long-range policy of that country. They should "say everything we could to the Englishmen here, in order that just sentiments might prevail in England at this moment . . . to disabuse and undeceive everybody; to drive out of countenance and into infamy every narrow thought of cramping, stinting, impoverishing or enfeebling us. To show that it is their only interest to show themselves our friends, to wear away, if possible, the memory of past unkindnesses."[22]

As the peace discussions continued, word came from England through Benjamin Vaughan, a special emissary of Shelburne, that the ministry was much embarrassed over the matter of the Tories and wished for some face-saving formula that would prevent the negotiations from breaking down. The formula was finally found in the provisions of Article V, which stated: "It is agreed that the Congress shall earnestly recommend it to the legislatures of the respective states to provide for the restitution of all estates, rights, and properties which have been confiscated . . . and that persons . . . shall have free liberty to go into any part or parts of any of the thirteen of the United States and therein to remain twelve months unmolested in their endeavors to obtain restitution of such of their estates, rights, and properties as may have been confiscated." Finally, that no future confiscations should take place.

The issue of the fisheries developed unexpected difficulties—the problem of the jurisdictions of the respective powers; what limitations should be imposed on the right of Americans to fish off the banks of Newfoundland and Cape Breton, and to dry fish on these British islands. Oswald, Strachey and Fitzherbert, the latter an addition to the British negotiators, proposed that United States fishermen be allowed no closer than three leagues from the shore of Newfoundland, and fifteen from those of Cape Breton. Adams argued strongly against such a limitation and in turn put forth an article which stipulated that the "United States shall continue to enjoy unmolested the right to take fish of every kind . . . and in all places where the inhabitants of both countries used at any time before to fish." More important, Adams insisted on the right, which Franklin had not included in his "necessary articles," of the American fishermen to cure their fish on the shores of Newfoundland. Without this provision the right of fishing would be much inhibited.

In support of his article Adams pointed out shrewdly that if the English accepted the American proposal they would in fact be granting more generous terms than the French had made in the Treaty of Alliance of 1778. This would create good will in the United States and put pressure on the French to be equally generous. After further discussion the three Englishmen withdrew to confer and Fitzherbert returned to announce that they had agreed to join in urging that the American position on the fisheries and the Tories be accepted by the ministry. The commissioners then sat down once more to go over the treaty, to review and correct it with the purpose of preparing a draft that might be copied and signed the next day.

Included was a secret clause which provided that if West Florida was British at the end of the war its northern boundary would be the mouth of the Yazoo River (about 32°28′) instead of 31° if it remained in the hands of Spain.

The following day, November 30, the commissioners met twice more, first at Jay's house, then at Oswald's. There were a few last-minute changes. Henry Laurens, who had recently joined the negotiators, added a stipulation that the British troops upon evacuating American posts should carry off no Negroes or other American property. The point was agreed to and incorporated, and the various copies of the treaty signed and sealed, after which the commissioners, English and American, rode out to Passy to dine with Franklin. The war was virtually over and American independence assured on remarkably generous terms. As soon as Britain reached an agreement with France the preliminary articles were to go into effect and hostilities would cease. There were still, of course, possible pitfalls. The British ministry might not accept the work of its agents. Shelburne might fall and Lord North replace him and repudiate the treaty. Vergennes had not been consulted on the negotiations and the preliminary articles had been signed without his agreement or concurrence, in direct violation of the instructions of Congress.

But balancing all this was the fact that it was a handsome treaty from the American point of view. If one put aside the matter of the collection of British debts, the vaguely worded article on the Tories, and the secret article on West Florida, the Americans had gained every important point and yielded on none. All this had been accomplished, Adams and Jay were convinced, against the wishes in a number of specific instances of the

French court. The commissioners had every reason to congratulate themselves and then to turn a somewhat apprehensive eye on the French Foreign Minister. Vergennes, who doubtless knew very well what had been going on, even to the specific details of the treaty, was perhaps almost as well pleased as the Americans. Spain hung around his neck like an albatross. He could not appear in the eyes of his ally to approve formally of treaty arrangements unacceptable to the Spanish court. Yet that country was proving a problem. It was faced with the prospect of being, next to Britain itself, the principal loser in the war. Gibraltar was still in British hands and West Florida was in danger of being snatched from the Spanish. The *fait accompli* with which the Americans presented him enabled Vergennes to plead innocent to Spain and at the same time brought considerable pressure on that power to agree to reasonable terms in the joint negotiation which she was conducting with France to end the war between those two nations and Great Britain.

The measure of the American accomplishment was perhaps best indicated by a letter from Vergennes to Rayneval: "You will notice," Vergennes wrote, "that the English buy the peace more than they make it. Their concessions, in fact, as much as to the boundaries as to the fisheries and the loyalists, exceed all that I should have thought possible. What can be the motive that could have brought terms so easy that they could have been interpreted as a kind of surrender?" Vergennes's only expression of annoyance was his remark, again to Rayneval, that "their signature is nonetheless premature."[23]

Historians ever since the eighteenth century have debated the intentions and the purity of the French. The motives on which the French acted are perhaps by now clear to the reader. Without attributing duplicity to them or indicting Vergennes as a would-be betrayer of American interests, it is well to emphasize what Vergennes's letter makes clear beyond any shadow of a doubt: however sympathetic Vergennes may or may not have been to the United States, he clearly thought that the Americans were entirely unrealistic in their demands and that England had no intention of making such concessions. Therefore, if consulted, he would have urged the American commissioners quite sincerely, as he indeed did on the issue of the Tories, to trim their sails. At every point in his long contact with the representatives of Congress the Count did his best to moderate their demands and guide their steps and it would have been remarkable if he had not. What better hand could there have been to guide the American novices through the troubled waters of European diplomacy than the wise and experienced Foreign Minister of the United States' great ally? So, in fact, it seemed to many honest men. But the proof was ultimately in the pudding. The result of the independent action of the commissioners, and Vergennes's astonishment at it, went further to vindicate their course of action than volumes of disputation could ever do. In Adams' more reflective moments he acknowledged, as he had done often during the course of his mission, that the Count acted in a manner that was perfectly consistent with the requirements of honor and of his responsibilities as Foreign Minister to His Catholic Mightiness, the King of France. His argument was not with Vergennes for doing what his office required of him, but with those members of Congress who were ready to deliver the United States into the hands of the Count, trussed up like a prize pig at a county fair.

It has been the particular and curious habit of Americans—both their strength and their weakness—to see all matters in moral terms and to view vast, generalized movements in terms of particular personalities. This compulsion has almost invariably complicated the task of Secretaries of State, baffled allies, and infuriated enemies. Nowhere was it more in evidence than at the beginning of our history as a nation. Adams, certainly, did not entirely transcend it (Franklin was the only negotiator who did, but then Franklin was a theoretical, not a practicing moralist), but Adams came closer than almost any of his compatriots. He tempered his impulse to translate complicated problems of international politics into terms of simple morality, of good and bad men, by his brilliant if intermittent insights into the reality that lay behind the maneuvers in the extraordinary game he was so deeply involved in. If a diplomat must choose between the contrary vices of excessive suspicion or naïveté, he had rather err on the side of the former. Though some of Adams' suspicions were unfounded, the course of action he laid down on the basis of his inclination to anticipate the worst served his country far better than simple trustfulness could have done.

Relieved and grateful at the outcome of the negotiations, Adams made a generous acknowledgment of Franklin's contribution. Once he had fallen in with the determination of Jay and Adams to conduct separate and secret negotiations with the British, he had "gone on with us in entire harmony and unanimity throughout, and has been able and useful both by his sagacity and his reputation in the whole negotiation." Adams sent off a letter to Livingston enclosing a copy of the preliminary articles and requesting leave "to resign all my employments in Europe."[24] It was left to Franklin to notify Vergennes of the signing of the British treaty.

Vergennes waited two weeks to reply and his letter, when it came, contained a sharp rebuke: "I am at a loss, sir, to explain your conduct and that of your colleagues on this occasion," he wrote Franklin. "You have concluded your preliminary articles without any communication between us, although the instructions from Congress prescribe that nothing shall be done without the participation of the King. . . . You are wise and discreet, sir; you perfectly understand what is due to propriety; you have all your life performed your duties. . . . I am not desirous of enlarging these reflections; I commit them to your own integrity."[25]

Franklin made his apologies in person. The two men who knew each other so well, who were so alike in temperament, so subtle and percipient in the wisdom of their years, played out their parts with the skill of accomplished actors. Vergennes was cool and aloof, Franklin humble and contrite. His age, his friendship for France, his love for his country, the intractability of his colleagues (though he did not say it), must plead for him.

What could not be said weighed far more heavily than the cautious phrases that the two men exchanged. Franklin departed and back at Passy wrote a letter that same evening requesting a further French loan of six million livres. Vergennes, writing to Luzerne, professed astonishment at the doctor's temerity, but failed to mention that the King had already determined to grant the request.

With the treaty well on its way to becoming an accomplished fact, Adams reflected on his diplomatic travails. "I will venture to say," he wrote in his diary, "however feebly I may have acted my part, or whatever mistakes I may have committed, yet the situations I have been in, between angry nations and more angry factions, have been some of the most singular and interesting that ever happened to any man. The fury of enemies as well as of elements, the subtlety and arrogance of allies and, what has been worse than all, the jealousy, envy and little pranks of friends and copatriots, would be one of the most instructive lessons in morals and politics that ever was committed to paper."

In order to provide his allies in Congress with as complete an account of the peace negotiations as possible and one which not unnaturally put his own role in the best light, Adams had that portion of his journal which contained his day-to-day narrative of the progress of discussions copied out. It was his intention to send it to his friend, one of the Massachusetts delegates to Congress, Jonathan Jackson, but on the spur of the moment he thrust it into the pouch containing his official dispatches and directed to Secretary Livingston. It would look as though he had made an error and placed a personal communication in the official packet by mistake. Livingston would thus read what appeared to be Adams' confidential remarks. One of the few devious acts of Adams' long career, it was prompted by vanity and the desire for self-justification. He would suffer from the unhappy effects of his impulse.[26]

With the American treaty out of the way, the negotiations between Britain, Spain and France proceeded rapidly. On the twentieth of January 1783 the American commissioners were summoned to Versailles by Vergennes to affix their signatures to the preliminary articles of "peace and armistice." The Count de Aranda, the Spanish ambassador, was present, Jay was in Normandy for his health and Laurens had gone to Bath, so that Franklin and Adams signed for the United States. The commissioners showed their commissions and signed the documents. "Thus was this mighty system terminated with as little ceremony," Adams wrote, "and in as short a time as a marriage settlement."

Adams could not forbear to chide Vergennes on the French treatment of the Dutch. It had been due as much as anything to the pressures of France that the Dutch had involved themselves in an inexpedient and disastrous war with England. They had entered halfheartedly, fought halfheartedly and suffered heavily in trade, in ships and in empire. In the peace negotiations they had been cut adrift to make their own way as best they could. What, Adams asked the Count, was to become of Holland? The minister's smile, cynical and indifferent, told more about French policy than a whole cabinetful of dispatches. France had nothing to do with that. The Dutch must shift for themselves. Adams' responding smile acknowledged the irony of the situation, but his voice bore an edge of rebuke. It was true enough that the United States and France had nothing to do with it, but Holland had dealt honestly with America and Adams, personally, was much interested "in the welfare and the safety of that people." The Count, a little nettled by the implied reproach, "assumed an affected air of seriousness and said he interested himself in it to a good deal." But France had enough to worry about in appeasing its stubborn and demanding ally Spain, which, having accomplished little enough during the war, looked to the French King to rake its chestnuts out of the British fire. The plight of the Dutch, Adams reflected, was an object lesson on the fate of a nation unable to protect its own interests.

XL

In Congress the path was smoothed for consideration of the treaty by a letter from Jay, enclosing a copy of an intercepted letter from Marbois to Vergennes suggesting that America's claim to the Newfoundland fishery had no reasonable basis and that France, in consequence, had no obligation to support it, then commenting that to allow Britain to keep its border posts in the United States after peace would make the Americans more than ever dependent on France. As James Madison, a firm friend of France, noted, "the tenor of it, with the comments of Mr. Jay, affected deeply the sentiments of Congress with regard to France."

In defense of America's ally Madison added, "Candor will suggest . . . that the situation in France is and has been extremely perplexing. The object of her blood and money was not only independence but the commerce and gratitude of America; the commerce to render independence the more useful, the gratitude to render the commerce more permanent. It was necessary therefore, she supposed, that America should be exposed to the cruelties of her enemies and be made sensible of her own weaknesses in order to be grateful to the hand that relieved her."[1]

A week later Congress began to debate a motion to exempt the American commissioners "from the obligation to conform to the advice of France." The debate on the motion to free the commissioners was a warm one, but in the end it was the sentiment of a majority of the members that to make a change in the instructions at this hour would seem a pointed reflection on the good faith of America's ally and, on the whole, do more harm than good. The motion, therefore, was postponed, and a gracious letter from Luzerne, expressing the King's confidence that Congress would reject every proposal for a separate peace, quickly restored that body to fealty to France. A properly deferential reply was unanimously passed, "further testimony," as Madison wrote, "of the abatement of the effects of Mr. Jay's letter."

The debate on Marbois's intercepted missive had hardly ended when

Livingston received the draft of the preliminary treaty and a letter from Vergennes complaining of the "great indelicacy" with which he had been treated by the American commissioners and emphasizing, in contrast, the candor and good will of the French King. Livingston passed the treaty on to Congress with an indignant denunciation of the conduct of the ministers, especially with regard to the secret article, and asking permission to communicate it to Luzerne and to assure the French minister that, whoever held West Florida at the end of the war, the line of 32° 28′ would be honored by the United States—thus in effect repudiating the article if not the ministers.

The disclosure of the circumstances under which the treaty had been signed aroused a storm in Congress. The pro-French faction was much offended that the preliminary articles had been drafted without consultation with France and in defiance of the commissioners' instructions. The secret article, which had not been disclosed at the time the preliminary articles were made known to Vergennes, was of course the clearest breach of the American negotiators' injunctions and it drew the heaviest fire in Congress. Mercer of Virginia worked himself into a fine rage. "The conduct of our ministers throughout, particularly in giving in writing everything called for by the British expressive of disgust to France, was a mixture of follies which had no example, was a tragedy to America and a comedy to all the world besides." He felt, he declared, "inexpressible indignation at their meanly stooping, as it were, to lick the dust from the feet of a nation whose hands were still dyed with the blood of their fellow citizens." The American commissioners had shown "chicane and low cunning. . . . They proved that America had at once all the follies of youth and all the vices of old age." The ministers should be reprimanded and recalled. Rutledge, Williamson and Arthur Lee took up the cudgels in defense of the commissioners and young Alexander Hamilton gave a notably restrained and judicious analysis of their probable motivations. It was his notion that the ministers should be commended for their work and the secret article communicated to the French court.

The committee to whom the question was referred recommended that the American ministers "be thanked for their zeal and services in negotiating the preliminary articles" and "that they be instructed to make a communication of the separate article to the court of France in such a way as would best get over the concealment."

Eliphalet Dyer, the outspoken Connecticut delegate, "was opposed to the whole report. . . . He fully approved of every step taken by our ministers, as well as towards Great Britain as towards France." Arthur Lee "fully agreed" with him. The general sentiment of the members swung toward a postponement until more information was available to Congress. But the issue was not dropped until several members had expressed their opinion that it was "very singular that the British minister should have confided to Mr. Adams an intended expedition from New York against West Florida, as very reprehensible in the latter to become the depository of secrets hostile to the friends of his country, and that every motive of honor and prudence made it the duty of Congress to impart the matter to the Spaniards." Mercer made a motion to this effect and Madison seconded it, but in Madison's words, "it being near the usual hour of adjournment, the House being agitated by the debates on the separate article, and a large proportion of the members predetermined against every measure which seemed in any manner to blame the ministers, and the eastern delegates in general extremely jealous of the honor of Mr. Adams, an adjournment was passed and carried without any vote on the motion."

Before Congress could resume debate on the preliminary treaty word arrived that the preliminaries for a general peace had been signed on the twentieth of January, eight weeks earlier. This news made the congressional concern over the preliminary articles between Great Britain and America obsolete, but the issue of the separate article still remained and Congress continued to be sharply split in its attitudes toward it.

Livingston, acting on the instructions of Congress, wrote to the commissioners congratulating them on the terms of the treaty and then reprimanding them for conducting the negotiations in secret and for signing the preliminary articles without first revealing them to Vergennes. "The concealment was, in my opinion," the Secretary wrote, "absolutely unnecessary."

When Adams received Livingston's letter, it touched off a whole series of communications from the New Englander, explaining and justifying the actions of the commissioners. It was Adams' conviction that if the commissioners had submitted the provisional treaty with Great Britain to Vergennes he would have congratulated them warmly upon it but requested them not to sign it until France and Spain were ready to sign. Such a delay would have imperiled the treaty because the shaky Shelburne ministry was about to fall and all indications were that its successor would be much less inclined to make similar concessions to the United States. The commissioners would then have had the choice of signing in direct defiance of Vergennes—which might have produced a crisis in Franco-American relations—or waiting patiently while their hard-won treaty was washed away. Fitzherbert, Adams wrote Livingston, "told me that the Count de Vergennes had 'fifty times reproached him for ceding the fisheries, and said it was ruining the English and French commerce both.' It was not suspicion, it was certain knowledge that they were against us on the points of the Tories, fisheries, Mississippi and the Western country. The iron was struck in the few critical moments when it was of a proper heat, and has been molded into a handsome vessel," he added. "If it had been suffered to cool, it would have flown in pieces like glass. Our countrymen have great reason to rejoice that they have obtained so good a peace when and as they did."

Of the kind of confidence in the French court that Congress seemed to want the commissioners to have, Adams wrote sharply, "I must have been an idiot to have entertained such confidence. . . . I should be more of a Machiavellian or a Jesuit than I ever was or will be to counterfeit it to you or to Congress." Since ingratitude was "an odious vice," it was essential, he insisted to Livingston, to distinguish "between those points for which we are not obliged to our allies from those which we are." He then enumerated the grounds for gratitude—the generous loans, the troops, the fleets—and reminded the Secretary "that France had profited, too, in great measure by that aid." The French are, besides, he wrote, "a good-natured and humane nation, very respectable in arts, letters, arms and commerce, and, therefore, motives of interest, honor and convenience join themselves to those of friendship and gratitude to induce us to wish for the continuance of their friendship and alliance. . . . My voice and advice will, therefore, always be for discharging with the utmost fidelity, gratitude and exactness every obligation we are under to France, and for cultivating her friendship and alliance by all sorts of good offices." But to do all that effectively Americans must be "manly," "honest," and above all "independent."[2]

It was Adams' nature that, with the preliminary articles of peace signed and his Dutch mission widely acclaimed as a brilliant diplomatic success, he should torment himself by raking over the matter of what he felt more and more keenly was his betrayal by Congress. He told the story to whoever would listen and finally poured it most indiscreetly into the ears of the astonished Benjamin Vaughan. The round of court life, of balls and dinners grew increasingly burdensome. "I am weary, disgusted, affronted and disappointed," he wrote. Franklin would get the credit for the treaty, and he would bear whatever censure Congress might impose for violating its instructions. "This state of mind," he said to himself severely, "I must alter and work while the day lasts." Yet he nursed the wound, writing, "I have been injured and my country has joined me in the injury; it has basely prostituted its honor by sacrificing mine. But the sacrifice of me was not so servile and intolerable as putting us all under guardianship. Congress surrendered their own sovereignty into the hands of a French minister. Blush! blush! ye guilty records! blush and perish! It is glory to have broken such infamous orders. Infamous, I say, for so they will be to all posterity. How can such a stain be wiped out? Can we cast a veil over it and forget it?"

It would have been well if Adams could have taken his own advice. But posterity tormented him; he felt the itch of fame and scratched until he was raw. Records were uncertain things; historians were feeble reeds to trust one's honor to. In his mind's eye he could see generations of these gray gentlemen poking through dusty archives and, without him at their shoulders to explain and correct, making their vagrant, imprecise judgments, summing up the agony and travail of a man's life in a few condescending words and returning a verdict with the magisterial authority of the Almighty. To live under the eye of God, as any Puritan knew, was demanding enough, but to live under the fickle and myoptic eye of posterity was far more hazardous.

Loudly and repeatedly as John might affirm his desire to return to his own fireside at Braintree, there was something which he desired more. Deeply and desperately, he longed to be the first ambassador of the United States to the Court of St. James. Rumors had it that Congress would send a commissioner and perhaps an ambassador to negotiate a commercial treaty with Great Britain. Laurens, Jay, Franklin, Arthur Lee, Izard and Jefferson were all mentioned as prominent candidates. Adams' name was also on the list and he wrote to Abigail that "Congress will commit a mistake by appointing any other." But suppose a commission should come for him? He confessed he was "frightened at the thought of it. How will the King and courtiers, the city and the country look at me?" he asked. "What prospect can I have of a tolerable life there? I shall be slandered and plagued there more than in France. It is a sad thing that simple integrity should have so many enemies in this world, without deserving one."[3]

He felt that he deserved the post on the basis of his services to his country and, next to Franklin, as its most experienced diplomat, but he was mortally afraid that the plum would go to the Pennsylvanian. In his secret heart he would always love and honor England. The bitterness he felt toward that country was, at bottom, the bitterness of a rejected child for the beloved parent. He was in his own way English to the bone. With the cessation of hostilities, he felt a revival of all the ties of affection and admiration for a people who, with all their faults, enjoyed the best constitution, the fairest and most judicious laws of any nation in the world. The power and the majesty of British history were part of him, her heroes were his—from Alfred and the Barons of Runnymede to Algernon Sidney, Locke and Pitt. England, which he had never seen, was part of his chemistry. The blood of Englishmen was in his veins and English words were on his tongue. The law which he worshiped as a kind of lesser deity, or, perhaps better, as a mundane manifestation of the divine mind, was English common law. American as he was, he still felt profoundly English as well. To go to the British court, to be received by the British King would be the sweetest triumph imaginable. That mad dog, that rebel Adams, clothed in the dignity of an ambassador from a sovereign state—it was a delicious prospect! Beyond that Adams was convinced that he was the proper man to effect a rconciliation, to bind up the wounds inflicted through seven long years of war, to re-establish those ties of common interest and mutual affection that had united colonies and Mother Country for a century and a half.

The position of ambassador to the Court of St. James would be a difficult and trying one. "Yet," he wrote Abigail, "it is in the eyes of many the apple of paradise. I see such symptoms of an ardent desire of it in several persons as to make me smile very often." However, the appointment of someone else to the post which, he continued to protest, he did not desire would be a direct slap at him: "I should not feel very reverential under such an indignity, such a mark of contempt as the appointment of another to that court, while I am in Europe." Then he added: "If I ever merited the appointment, I have done nothing since to forfeit it, but on the contrary have rendered to the public since that time such services as were never rendered by any other minister in Europe."

In order to enhance the prize he must emphasize the dangers and difficulties that would attend it. "In England, the only place where I could go with honor, I should live the life of a man in a barrel spiked with nails," he wrote Abigail. "The vanity, pride, revenge of that people, irritated by the French and Franklinian politics, would make it purgatory to me."

Perhaps he should never have ventured abroad himself, but then he added self-righteously, "Where would have been our cod and haddock, our beaver skins, deerskins and pine trees? Alas, all lost, perhaps. Indeed I firmly believe so in good conscience. I cannot therefore repent all my fatigues, cares, losses, escapes, anxious days and sleepless nights. Nothing in life ever cost me so much sleep or made me so many gray hairs as the anxiety I have suffered for these three years on the score of these objects. Nobody knows of it; nobody cares for it. But I shall be rewarded in heaven, I hope."

He confided his feelings quite fully to his friend Warren. If anyone else was appointed ambassador to Great Britain he would consider it a direct rebuke to him and come home at once. "In truth," he wrote, "I sigh for repose. My family has become an indispensable necessary of life to me. I am no longer a boy, nor a young man—and there is no employment however honorable, no course of life however brilliant, has such a luster in my imagination as absolutely a private life. My farm and my family glitter before my eyes every day and night." Moreover he was "too old and atrocious an offender not to have millions of enemies" in England. He suspected that Franklin and Vergennes would conspire to have him sent to Holland on the ground that if he returned to the United States and were elected to Congress he might stiffen the collective spine of that body and make it less amenable to the direction of Vergennes.[4]

Despite what John felt was his own decisive role in the treaty negotiations, Franklin continued to receive the applause and the praise of the French nation, the favors of the crown, and to be bracketed with Washington as the instrument of American independence. All this rankled in Adams' bosom and was an abomination to him. If he had been more supine, he wrote Abigail, he might have had "gold snuffboxes, clappings at the opera (I don't mean from the girls), millions of paragraphs in the newspapers in praise of me, visits from the great, dinners, wealth, power, splendor, picture busts, statues, and everything which a vain heart, and mine is much too vain, could desire."

There must be men who would be eternally vigilant in the cause of liberty and independence. Their role was that of critics, jealous of the slightest impairment of liberty, determined to resist any infringement of their nation's independence. For their pains such men could expect no more than to be denounced as suspicious and contentious, but without them "the world would be worse than it is. Is not this after all the noblest ambition? . . . Cato will never be consul but Cato's ambition was sublimer than Caesar's, and his glory and even his catastrophe more desirable," he concluded.[5]

In the matter of the commission, Adams decided on a direct attack. He wrote a long letter to Livingston early in February, explaining and justifying his conduct. It had always been his view, he reminded the Secretary, "that the business of America with Europe was commerce, not politics or war; and, above all, that it never could be in our interest to ruin Great Britain, or injure or weaken her any further than should be necessary to support our independence and our alliances; and that as soon as Great Britain should be brought to a temper to acknowledge our sovereignty and our alliances, it would be our interest and duty to be her friends, as well as the friends of all the other powers of Europe, and enemies to none." The letter was an unabashed bid for the restoration of his powers to negotiate a treaty of commerce with Great Britain. It might also serve the subsidiary purpose of underlining his qualifications for the post of ambassador to that country. "It is our part," he wrote, "to be the first to send a minister to Great Britain, which is the older and as yet the superior state. There was another advantage in acting promptly. While the prize of the ambassadorship to the Court of St. James remained to be awarded, "it will be a source of jealousy among present ministers and such as are or may be candidates to be foreign ministers, a source of intrigue and faction among their partisans and adherents."

Since Adams had originally held a similar commission before it was peremptorily and inexplicably withdrawn, it might not be inappropriate for him to mention some of the qualities which a minister to the British court should have: "In the first place, he should have an education in classical learning and in the knowledge of general history, ancient, modern, and particularly the history of France, England, Holland and America. He should be well versed in the principles of ethics, of the law of nature and nations, of legislature and government, of the Roman civil law, of the laws of England and the United States, of the public law of Europe, and in the letters, memoirs and histories of those great men who have heretofore shone in the diplomatic order and conducted the affairs of nations and the world." He should be a man of ripe years and maturity of judgment but not too old or infirm for a demanding assignment. Lastly he should "possess an upright heart and an independent spirit, and should be one who decidedly makes the interest of his country, not the policy of any other nation nor his own private ambition or interest, or those of his family, friends, and connections, the rule of his conduct." If John Adams was the only man who seemed to have these formidable qualifications, that was not his fault.[6]

But what he had done was too transparent. He quite obviously had drawn a line that excluded Franklin. None of the talents enumerated, at least in Adams' view, were those of the doctor. Distinguished as he was as a scientist, as a moralist and inventor, no one had ever suggested that Franklin had any pretensions to learning in the law, nor was he noted as a student of history or a master of the classics. He was at that moment trying to procure a diplomatic appointment for his grandson; he was seventy-seven years of age and suffering from stones and the gout.

The letter of course delighted Adams' enemies and embarrassed his friends. His services argued his case far better than Adams could himself. So patently an application for the position and that at the cost of ungenerous swipes at his most prominent rival, the letter set back the efforts of his supporters to secure the ambassadorship for him. It would perhaps have ruined a lesser man. Along with the misdirected diary, it gave a picture of a vain, supremely self-confident man who wished for a particular office with more intensity and ambition than it is generally thought proper for statesmen to have or, of a certainty, to reveal.

Adams was no more vain or ambitious than the next man, but he was certainly less successful in dissembling his ambition and his vanity. This was his curse—that he should always reveal himself, always stand forth naked before the world and hear mocking laughter ringing in his ears, stabbing like knives. It was this transparency of action, of expression, of gesture, of stance that made him singularly unsuited for the role of a diplomat, so that his triumphs must be won by what was, for his opponents, an astonishing tenacity and undeflectable determination.

Arthur Lee fed his hopes by writing that Congress was about to take up the appointment of a minister to England. "I think you stand the fairest for the embassy to the Court of St. James." When Adams opened the letter he read the words with mingled feelings. There it was, his secret desire, spread out quite casually on the page, and with the promise of confirmation, too. With all this he could do nothing but wait on the decision of his master, Congress. It was there that his future would be decided, in the unpredictable councils of that assembly. Tossed about by sectional rivalries, interstate jealousies and personal ambitions, his fate must be uncertain to say the least. Since he was not a patient man, he worried himself into a kind of fever of anxiety and, frequently, despair.

In such an uneasy frame of mind, Adams received Abigail's letter informing him of the budding romance between young Royall Tyler and Nabby. The news pierced him to the heart. This was his eldest child, his princess, his adored daughter. She was too young to think of marriage, a child still, and here was some disreputable fellow sniffing around. Her mother, who should have guarded her, seemed an abettor of this doubtless perfumed, poetical wastrel who played at courtship. Every protective and combative instinct was aroused. He still saw Nabby as the child she had been when he left Braintree. In the years of her father's absence she had become a woman, but in the eye of recollection she was still a girl.

The letter, with its alarming news, strengthened his desire to come home. "I confess," he wrote Abigail, "I don't like the subject at all." Nabby was too young to think of marriage. Even the mention of the word "dissipation" alarmed him. She was certainly "not to be the prize, I hope, of any, even reformed, rake." A young man who had spent his fortune "in gaieties," he added, "is not the youth for me, let his family, connections and taste for poetry be what they will." He was not looking "for a poet nor a professor of the belle letters." That was blunt enough, but his conclusion was more emphatic still: "Your family as well as mine have too much cause to rue the qualities which by your account have been in him. . . . I positively forbid any connection between my daughter and any youth upon earth who does not totally eradicate every taste for gaiety and expense."

Then in a final outpouring which revealed his own troubled state of mind, he rebuked Abigail sharply: "I don't like this method of courting mothers. There is something too fantastical and affected in this business for me—it is not nature, modest, virtuous, noble nature. . . . I would give the world to be with you tomorrow. . . . I don't love to go home in a miff, pet or passion nor with an ill grace."[7]

A week after his outburst he wrote Abigail again, a little apologetically: "A packet from you is always more than I can bear. It gives me a great pleasure, the highest pleasure, and therefore makes me and leaves me melancholy, like the highest strains of music." He was determined, he insisted, to come home if Congress did not "restore to me my honor," by giving him a new commission to negotiate a commercial treaty with Great Britain. His message to Nabby was subdued and poignant. "My 'image' [she was supposed to resemble her father strongly], my 'superscription,' my 'princess,' take care how you dispose of your heart. I hoped to be at home and to have chosen a partner for you—or at least to have given you some good advice before you should choose." She should have "a thinking being, and one who thinks for others' good and feels another's woe. It must be one who can ride five hundred miles upon a trotting horse and cross the Gulf Stream with a steady heart. One may dance or sing, or play or ride, without being good for much."[8]

He could not get Nabby's affair out of his mind. Life was a hazardous affair at best. To succeed, especially at the bar, required the greatest firmness of temper, the greatest resolution, the greatest tenacity and industry. Flaws, however minor, might be fatal. He knew the Tyler family well. He could trace back their strengths and failings for several generations and through second and third cousins. The exercise did not reassure him. Royall's brother had made a poor figure in Europe as the representative of a commercial house. His father had been a successful but not entirely reliable man. Yet there was no denying that the family had "long had great influence" in Boston.

Tyler was "but a prodigal son," he wrote Abigail a few days later, "and though a penitent, has no right to your daughter, who deserves a character without a spot. . . . You seem to me to have favored this affair far too much, and I wish it off." Yet that was perhaps too severe. The thought of his daughter's unhappiness and Abigail's pain at his hot words made him more tender. "I cannot judge," he confessed. ". . . I must submit to my daughter's destiny, to her own judgment and her own heart, with your advice and the advice of our parents and brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts, etc." Perhaps it was simply selfishness which had prompted his resistance. "I had flattered myself with the hopes of a few years of the society of this daughter at her father's house. But if it must be otherwise I must submit."[9]

At the same time Nabby's romance made him acutely homesick. "I had rather chop wood and dig ditches and make fences upon my poor little farm," he wrote Abigail. "Alas! poor farm and poorer family, what have you lost that your country might be free?" And to his sons: "Boys! if you ever say one word or utter one complaint I will disinherit you. Work, you rogues, and be free. . . . Daughter! get you an honest man for a husband and keep him honest. . . . Think of no other greatness but that of the soul, no other riches but those of the heart. An honest, sensible, humane man, above all the littleness of vanity and extravagances of imagination, laboring to do good rather than be rich, to be useful rather than make a show, living in modest simplicity clearly within his means and free from debts or obligations, is really the most respectable man in society."[10]

All diplomatic activity was suspended while the commissioners waited for word from Congress on the preliminary articles of the treaty. The problem of communication between Congress and her ministers was emphasized by the fact that the commissioners by the middle of April had received no word from America as to the reception of the treaty, dispatched in November by four different vessels sailing for American ports. Almost five months had thus passed without response to the most important European news since the outbreak of the war. Adams complained bitterly of "the profound silence of Congress, and the total darkness in which we are left concerning their sentiments," a darkness "very distressing to us and very dangerous and injurious to the public."[11]

To Abigail he wrote: "Day after day, week after week, month after month, roll away and bring us no news. I am so weary of this idle, useless time that I don't know what to do with myself." He found some recompense in the company of Jay. The latter's firmness during the treaty negotiations had won Adams' admiration and gratitude. "I shall never forget him or cease to love him while I live," he wrote Abigail.[12] For exercise the two men "trotted about the environs of Paris and speculated about a distant country where our hearts are," as Adams put it. The daily rides did much to restore his health. His time in Holland, he noted, had given him "many faithful remembrancers, and among the rest scurvy." He was bedeviled with boils, "fiery tumors," which broke out on various parts of his body. In addition to riding, he walked every day, "never less than a league and some days two or three. I am as careful of my diet, rest, etc., as much as possible; but all is not enough. I shall never get rid of the rest of that fever and the damp chills and sour, putrid streams of the Low Countries. Their records are full of me, and my veins are full of their stagnant water."[13] Even the three medals that the States-General sent him to commemorate his diplomatic triumphs in the Netherlands could not compensate for the loss of his health.

Concerned about the fate of the treaty and tormented by his desire to be appointed ambassador to the Court of St. James when and if the definitive treaty should be concluded, Adams found the round of diplomatic functions an increasing drag. He had to endure from many of his colleagues in the diplomatic corps "lowering glances, solemn looks, distant bows and other peculiarities," or at least so he imagined.[14] The days of the King's receptions at Versailles were especially tedious. The King, Queen and the members of the royal family—Monsieur le Comte d'Artois, Madame Elizabeth, Mesdames Victoire and Adelaide—must all be spoken to perfunctorily. They never had a bright or engaging comment, "No word is ever said," Adams noted, "except asking a question about some common thing as the weather, the spectacles, or have you come from Paris today?" There should be attached to the court, he reflected, an instructor "to teach the princes and the princesses that art of asking questions and making observations upon these occasions."

One of his few compensations for the tedious routine came at a dinner at Passy attended by the Count de Rochambeau, the Spanish ambassador, the Chevalier de Chastellux, and Mr. Jay. Chastellux, just back from America with Rochambeau, told the guests that Adams was the author of the Massachusetts constitution, "that it was the best of them all, and that the people were very contented with it."

John was delighted with a story that Jay relayed to him about Vergennes. During a dinner at Versailles the minister had asked, *"Où est Monsieur Adams?"* and Franklin answered, *"Il est à Paris."* Then, turning to Jay, Vergennes said, *"Ce monsieur a beaucoup d'esprit, et beaucoup de tête aussi,"* and Jay had answered dryly, *"Oui, monsieur, Monsieur Adams a beaucoup d'esprit."*

Occasionally at a diplomatic dinner Adams found good company and good conversation. At a banquet given by Vergennes for the diplomatic corps he thoroughly enjoyed himself talking animatedly to the Spanish and Sardinian ministers, the Dutch ambassador, and Monsieur Markow, the Russian minister whom he had known at The Hague. The conversation was wonderfully political and Adams plunged into it like a dusty swimmer into a lake. A few words with the Duke of Manchester, the British ambassador, about the Dutch negotiation, a conference with Brantsen, the Dutch minister, to get the perspective of the United Provinces, then a sharp exchange with the Count de Aranda, the Spanish ambassador: *"Tout, en ce monde, a été révolution,"* Aranda declared, and Adams answered that it was indeed true—the "universe was but a series of revolutions. Nature delighted in changes, and the world was but a string of them. But one revolution was enough for the life of a man." Adams trusted he would never have to go through another.

One of Adams' more pleasant chores was to receive a number of American pedagogues seeking European support for impoverished American institutions of higher learning. John Wheelock, President of Dartmouth College, sought Adams' advice in soliciting funds, and John sent him to his Dutch friends and urged him to try his luck in England. The Dutch patriots to whom Wheelock applied lectured him on the importance of developing Dutch-American trade and sent him away empty-handed. At Leyden and Rotterdam potential donors grumbled that, important as education was, negotiations for trade were more to the point. In the end the Prince of Orange was one of the few who offered a sizable contribution of five hundred and twenty-five florins.[15]

Trying to keep himself occupied, Adams turned his thoughts to science as well as to politics. In his diary, his special resource when he had time on his hands, he recorded his observations on natural phenomena as well as his reflections about European politics. A long passage on the problems of European power politics was followed, without explanation or transition, by the query: "What is it in the air which burns? When we blow a spark with the bellows, it spreads. We force a current of air to the fire, by this machine, and in this air are inflammable particles. Can it be in the same manner that life is continued by the breath? Are there particles conveyed into the blood of animals through the lungs which increase the heat of it or is the pulse caused by rarefying the blood or any part of it into vapor? . . . The external air, drawn into the lungs in breathing, through the mouth or nostrils, either leaves some particles behind, in the lungs, or in the blood, or carries some particles off with it. It may do both, i.e., carry in some particles that are salubrious, and carry out others which are noxious. The air once breathed is certainly altered. It is unfit to be breathed again. The body is said to render unfit for respiration a gallon of air in a minute. Four persons in a coach would render unfit four hogsheads of air in an hour, which is more than the coach would hold, which shows the necessity of keeping the windows open, and of frequently airing your dining rooms, keepings rooms and bedchambers. I suspect that the health of mankind is much injured by their inattention to this subject."

This speculation, remarkably close to the principle on which the lungs and blood were subsequently discovered to work, suggests on one hand the richness of speculation in the late eighteenth century, speculation which extended to every aspect of the universe and, beyond that, the strength and variety of Adams' own speculations, ranging from the nature of governments and the problems of power to the function of the lungs.

From his reflections about air Adams turned to a consideration of magnetism: "The lodestone is in possession of the most remarkable, wonderful and mysterious property in nature," he noted. "This substance [magnetism] is in the secret of the whole globe. It must have a sympathy with the whole globe. It is governed by a law and influenced by some active principle that pervades and operates from pole to pole, and from the surface to the center and the antipodes. . . . Break the stone to pieces, and each morsel retains two poles, a north and a south pole, and does not lose its virtue. The magnetic effluvia are too subtle to be seen by a microscope, yet they have great activity and strength. Iron has a sympathy with magnetism and electricity, which should be examined by every experiment which ingenuity can devise.

"Has it been tried," he continued, "whether the magnet loses any of its force in a vacuo? In a bottle charged with electrical fire, etc.? This metal called iron may one day reveal the secrets of nature. The primary springs of nature may be too subtle for all our senses and faculties. I should think however that no subject deserved more the attention of philosophers or was more proper for experiments than the sympathy between iron and the magnetical and electrical fluid.

"It would be worth while to grind the magnet to powder and see if the dust still retained the virtue. Steep the stone or the dust in wine, spirits, oil and other fluids to see if the virtue is affected, increased or diminished. Is there no chemical process that can be formed upon the stone or the dust to discover what it is that the magnetic virtue resides in? Whether boiling or burning the stone destroys or diminishes the virtue, see whether earth, air, water or fire, any wise applied, affects it, and how."[16]

After a three-month journey from St. Petersburg, John Quincy arrived at The Hague and moved into the Hôtel des Etats-Unis with the Dumases. Although Adams did not see him, it was a comfort to have him relatively nearby. He wrote his son regularly, admonishing and advising. His handwriting was not yet "remarkably neat"; he wished it to be "manly and beautiful." "Let it be your amusement," he noted, "to minute every day whatever you have seen or heard worth notice. . . . We think and improve our judgments by committing our thoughts to paper. Your exercise in Latin and Greek must not be omitted a single day, and you should turn your mind a little to mathematics. . . . You will find it as entertaining as an Arabian tale."

Further, John Quincy must learn to make the best of his time—that was the secret of a rewarding and successful life. He must apportion his hours for study, meals, amusements, exercise and sleep, and allow nothing to divert him, especially from those hours devoted to study. Most important of all, he must behave with circumspection and preserve the character he had acquired "for prudence and solidity." He was still a child and he must "treat the world with modesty, decency and respect." Moreover he should "never be too wise to ask a question."

Adams was pleased to hear that John Quincy had started to translate Suetonius into French; it was "a very proper book to teach you to love your country and her laws." In addition to his studies he should always have some light reading at hand. Adams would not advise him "to take these books from the shelf of plays and romances, nor yet from that of history." He recommended "books of morals as the most constant companions of your hours of relaxation through the whole of your life." Sermons on moral subjects should supplement Cicero and Senaca.[17]

For amusement John Quincy launched into the fourth Aeneid of Virgil with the help of Monsieur Dumas, who guided him through difficult passages and explained "everything which regards the ancient rites and ceremonies." While Dumas directed his studies, Madame Dumas mothered him and he in turn fell in love with Mademoiselle Dumas, a charming girl just a year older than John Quincy, with whom he sang duets and played the flute.[18]

XLI

While the commissioners waited with growing impatience for congressional approval of the preliminary articles of the treaty, politics across the Channel were disturbingly turbulent. The Shelburne ministry, saddled with blame for the unpopular treaty, was breathing its last and half a dozen factions maneuvered to replace it. Finally, in April it quietly expired and was succeeded by the strange alliance of Charles James Fox, the Whig champion, and Lord North, the architect of Britain's disastrous colonial policy. The North-Fox ministry, by the very nature of the contradictions it incorporated, proved far more difficult to deal with than its predecessor. Fox, whom Adams had at first looked to as a friend of America, dismayed and disillusioned him by pushing a vote in the House of Commons which condemned the peace negotiated by Shelburne. At the same time the minister dispatched David Hartley, sympathetic to the American cause but "talkative and disputatious and not always intelligible" in Adams' view, to assure the commissioners that Great Britain would stand by the preliminary articles and bring things to a speedy conclusion.

Adams was not impressed. "I should be surprised at nothing from the present ministry," he wrote Livingston. "If they have any plan at all, it is a much less generous one towards America than that of her immediate predecessors."[1] He felt sure that if Congress had not revoked his power to negotiate a commercial treaty with Great Britain he could have concluded one on the heels of the preliminary articles which would have mitigated, to a degree at least, the British bitterness over the Anglo-American portion of the general treaty and perhaps have prevented the Shelburne ministry from falling to the uneasy Fox-North coalition.

The fall of the Shelburne ministry set Jay and Adams to considering the terms of the final treaty which presumably would be concluded as soon as they received the approval of Congress. Jay called at Adams' apartments and Adams, in his own words, "showed him a variety of projects which I had drawn up last night concerning the removal of the troops, opening the ports, tranquillizing the Tories now within the lines; articles for commerce, in explanation of the provisional treaty, etc." Together they sketched out a plan for the withdrawal of the British troops in New York and the satisfaction of the Tories. They took their handiwork to Laurens, "who thought it might do." Adams urged that the commissioners take a flexible position on commerce—accept the recommendations of Franklin and Jay, or David Hartley's proposal to let the trade go on as before the war—because he felt confident that in time England would perceive its true interests clearly enough to join in a mutually satisfactory commercial treaty.

The following day the four commissioners met with Hartley and agreed that the ports of the United States would be open to British vessels as soon as the British evacuated the United States. Again, in private conversation with Hartley, Adams told the Englishman that he believed the only rational and intelligent policy for America to pursue was to seek to restore normal trade relations with Great Britain. The French had attempted to obstruct this policy so that they might profit the more from American commerce, but Adams wanted Americans subservient to no nation. "As Christians," he said, "I wished them meek; as statesmen, I wished them proud for a change." Hartley "was very silent and attentive." "It is necessary," Adams noted in his journal, "to let the English ministers know where their danger lies, and the arts used to dampen the ardor of returning friendship."

Adams carried to his diary his concern about the progress of the final peace negotiations. England must see that a vengeful spirit which sought to punish America for winning her independence could only, in the long run, hurt the former Mother Country by keeping alive resentments and antagonisms which should die and be decently buried. England, he told Hartley in another conversation, was also pursuing a mistaken policy toward Holland, a cavalier, highhanded attitude, a determination to punish that country for declaring war against England and to support the party of the Stadtholder as opposed to the republicans. If France grew too powerful and too bold England would need the friendship and support of the Dutch. A United Netherlands, thrown into the arms of France by a truculent Britain, in any future struggle for power would be a serious thorn in that country's side. The indifference of Vergennes to the plight of Holland had doubtless made that unhappy country amenable to any conciliatory gesture from Great Britain.

The English ministers (if Hartley ever presumed to convey this unsolicited advice from a man they still regarded as a rebel leader) remained deaf to such injunctions. It was left for subsequent events to prove the correctness of John's analysis.

Adams had a commercial treaty constantly in mind. Any such agreement must allow American merchants to have access to the West Indian Islands, he wrote Livingston. "This is of great importance to us, and to the islands, and I think to Great Britain too. Yet there is a formidable party for excluding us, at least from carrying the produce of those islands to Great Britain. . . . Much," Adams added, "will depend upon the minister you first send to London. An American minister would be a formidable being to any British minister whatever. He would converse with all parties, and if he is a prudent, cautious man, he would at this moment have more influence there than you can imagine. . . . It is not merely mercantile profit and convenience that is at stake; future wars, long and bloody wars, may be avoided or entailed upon our posterity, as we conduct wisely or otherwise the present negotiation with Great Britain."[2]

The French as well as the English seemed determined to keep American vessels out of the West Indies. The Duke de la Vauguyon told Adams as much at dinner. Commerce between the French West Indies and the United States, he said, would probably be confined to ships built in France and navigated by French seamen.

"So then, Monsieur le Duc," Adams replied, laughing a little wryly, "you have adopted the ideas of the British Navigation Act. But what if the United States should adopt them too, and make a law that no commerce should be carried on with any West Indian islands . . . but in ships built in America and navigated with American seamen?" A moment later Adams broke out in exasperation: "The English [are] a parcel of sots to exclude us, for the consequence [will] be that in fifteen or twenty years we [will] have another war with them."

"So much the better! So much the better! I felicitate you upon it," the Duke answered.

"So much the better for us," Adams replied, "because we shall conquer from the English in that case all their islands, the inhabitants of which would not declare for us if they dared. But it will not be better for the English. They will be the sots and dupes if they lay a foundation for it."

"Yes," Vauguyon said, "I believe you will have another war with the English."[3]

On the second of July a proclamation was issued by the King in Council which reserved the West Indian trade for British ships manned by British crews. It was a sharp blow at American commerce. "A system which has in it so little respect for us, and is so obviously calculated to give a blow to our nurseries of ships and seamen, could never have been adopted but from the opinion that we had no common legislature for the government of commerce," John noted in a letter to Livingston, adding, ". . . I hope the thirteen states will unite in some measure to counteract this policy of Britain, so evidently selfish, unsocial and, I had almost said, hostile. . . . Our natural share of the West India trade is all that is now wanting to complete the plan of happiness and prosperity of our country. Deprived of it, we shall be straitened and shackled in some degree. We cannot enjoy a free use of all our limbs without this; with it I see nothing to desire, nothing to vex or chagrin our people, nothing to interrupt our repose or keep up a dread of war."

The policy of America should be to encourage trade with other European nations, especially the Dutch, Portuguese and Danes, while striving to form a common commercial policy for all the states. "If the union of the states is not preserved," he wrote Livingston, "and even their unity in many great points, instead of being the happiest people under the sun, I do not know but we may be the most miserable. We shall find our foreign affairs the most difficult to manage of all our interests; we shall see and feel them disturbed by invisible agents and causes, by secret intrigues, by dark and mysterious insinuations, by concealed corruptions of a thousand sorts. . . . In short, if there is not an authority sufficiently decisive to draw together the minds, affections and forces of the states in their common foreign concerns, it appears to me we shall be the sport of transatlantic politicians of all denominations, who hate liberty in every shape and [hate] every man who loves it and every country that enjoys it." Only with a "common authority," a "common power" to fulfill "engagements with our citizens, to pay our soldiers and other creditors, can we have any moral character at home," he wrote. Otherwise America would be despised, the butt and plaything of European politics.[4]

It was especially important, in Adams' mind, that the United States meet its financial commitments. "Without a sacred regard to public justice," he wrote Robert Morris, "no society can exist; it is the only tie which can unite men's minds and hearts in pursuit of the common interest. . . . Every hesitation, every uncertainty about paying or receiving a just debt diminishes that sense of moral obligation of public justice which ought to be kept sure and carefully cultivated in every American mind." Without honoring the claims of America's creditors, foreign and domestic alike, Adams asked, "Can there ever be content and satisfaction? Can there ever be peace and order? Can there ever be industry or decency?"[5]

In the same spirit he dispatched a stream of letters to various members of Congress, exhorting them to find some means of paying the country's debts. "As to our own dear country," he wrote Henry Knox, "the most it wants at present is a little less drinking and extravagance at home and a little more liberality abroad and to agree upon taxes to pay the interest of their debts." Elias Boudinot, the President of Congress, wrote that Adams' letters on the subject of "our credit abroad and the strengthening and cementing of the union at home" were having "a very good effect" in helping to check a Congress which had been "running wild" in its fiscal measures.[6]

Despite Vergennes's acceptance of the preliminary treaty, Adams continued to regard the Foreign Minister with suspicion. He became more and more convinced that the Frenchman was a plotter against American liberties. Franklin, for his part, viewed Adams' alarms sometimes with an amused tolerance and sometimes with real annoyance. He felt that the New Englander's suspicions of the motives of the French court went beyond a proper caution and took on the character of a morbid hostility to himself and the Count de Vergennes. "The instances," he wrote to Livingston, "he supposes of their ill will to us . . . I take to be as imaginary as I know his fancies to be that Count de Vergennes and myself are continually plotting against him and employing the newswriters of Europe to depreciate his character, etc. . . . I am persuaded, however," the doctor added, "that he means well for his country, is always an honest man, often a wise one, but sometimes and in some things absolutely out of his senses."[7]

There was more than a little truth in Franklin's portrait. We have already noted that Adams with his feeling of persecution frequently verged on the paranoid. But he struggled hard, often unsuccessfully, against it and tried to prevent it from warping his perspective and clouding his judgment. Compared with Arthur Lee's clearly pathological suspicions, suspicions which certainly infected Adams to a degree, or with Jay's narrow and parochial attitude toward the entire French nation, Adams managed to keep his balance remarkably well.

The logic of a position, once assumed, almost invariably drives its possessor to extremes, especially if he is under constant political pressure from an opposition party. The natural human instinct for self-justification makes us more and more fervent in a cause and less inclined, ultimately less able, to perceive shades and nuances in our own and more particularly in the opposing viewpoint. But the genius of American politics has been a determined effort to transcend our propensity to partisanship and to eschew irreconcilability. It was natural to Adams' contentious, competitive and ambitious nature to be fiercely partisan and to impute to his enemies the darkest of motives. This impulse carried him to the verge of genuine paranoia; yet each time he managed to retain his equilibrium.

But the resentment toward Franklin never really died. As late as April 1784, Adams wrote a letter of almost pathological bitterness, which he apparently never sent, speaking of Franklin as "obsequious . . . selfish . . . and eaten with all the passions which prey upon old age unprincipled." Franklin had told him, Adams wrote, "that the United States ought to join France in two future wars against G.B.—the first to pay the debt we owe her for making war for us. And the second to show ourselves as generous as she had been." To Adams, who felt so strongly that the United States should steer an independent course and remain free of European entanglements, this was the ultimate heresy. It was fuzzy, unrealistic, emotional—all the things that a wise foreign policy should not be—and it confirmed every apprehension he had about his colleague's all-out commitment to France.

"It is high time his resignation was accepted," Adams declared of the Pennsylvanian. "He has done mischief enough. He has been possessed by the lowest cunning and the deepest hypocrisy I ever met." For Adams' own part he was "indifferent about all the laughers, weepers, cursers and flatterers. The first wish of my soul is to go home."[8] The slant of the writer's hand, the incision of his pen, the angry sprawling letters, all spoke vividly of the emotion behind the words. Adams had many hates and many loves. His dislike of Franklin was certainly an obsession, one that was shared by every American envoy with the exception of the unhappy Silas Deane. Arthur Lee, psychopathically suspicious, could be discounted, but John Jay, Henry Laurens and Francis Dana were all unusually able men who held during their lifetimes positions of the greatest responsibility. The fact that they were unanimous in their dislike of Franklin and without dissent felt that he was immoral, lazy, careless in his discharge of the routine duties of his post, excessively vain and far too much under the influence of Vergennes, suggests that Adams' accusations against Franklin were not without some foundation.

Adams also fell out with his friend Lafayette. The young hero, Adams discovered, had been one of the founders of the Order of the Cincinnati, a group of Continental officers, headed by Washington himself, who had organized at the end of the Revolution as a hereditary association. The society seemed to civilian Adams, and to many others who had been raised on the history of the military dictatorships of Greece and Rome, to be the first step toward a domination of the United States by a military elite. The hereditary aspect suggested an aristocratic bent that was most alarming. To Adams the Cincinnati was a dangerous and illegal organization and, as always, he was outspoken in expressing his suspicions. (Writing to Gerry, he called the Cincinnati "that inroad upon our first principle, equality.")[9]

When Lafayette's name and prestige were cited in support of the society, Adams did not hesitate to criticize the Marquis for his role in its formation and to suggest that it was more in keeping with the ideas of a French aristocrat and monarchist than an American devoted to the principles of republican government. Indeed, he went so far as to suggest that, with the Revolution over, the Marquis, who had planned to return to the United States for a visit, had no business there.

Busybodies carried Adams' remarks to the General and Lafayette was understandably offended. He wrote Adams a note full of injured dignity, asking if the reports were true; Adams replied sharply that he did indeed disapprove of the society. "It is," he wrote, "against our confederation and against the constitutions of several states . . . it is against the spirit of our governments and the genius of our people." Certainly if the Marquis wished to go to America that was his right. But Adams' tone suggested that he feared the Marquis's visit would serve as an encouragement to the Cincinnati.[10] To Arthur Lee he wrote that "the new order of chivalry" had given him "many a melancholy hour." He saw it as "a deep design to overturn the whole edifice of our republican liberty." Since most of the officers who formed its membership had no such intention they would doubtless disband voluntarily once it was pointed out to them how dangerous their enterprise was, how from knights the inclination would be to make barons, earls, viscounts, marquises and dukes, and these in turn would establish princes and kings. Again history presented ample evidence that such were the steps by which, inevitably, republics were overthrown.[11]

XLII

In Braintree, three thousand miles away, life went on its accustomed way. For Abigail, her husband's absence was a constant, aching void. A hundred little things a day that reminded her of him were like separate little pains of loneliness—to cook and not to cook for him, to darn and mend and not to feel the familiar texture of his shirts or socks, to sit by the fire late at night reading and not to sense his presence in the room with her, and then at last to climb the narrow little stairs with a wan candle and encounter the final emptiness, her bed, her couch of affliction, the loneliest place on earth, where she lay for sleepless hours beyond counting, enduring torments of the insomniac. She missed John's animal warmth, the solid feel of him, his smell, his heavy, regular breathing, even his snores.

The romance of Royall Tyler and Nabby, by the time John's stern letters arrived, had progressed to the point where Abigail could not bring herself to try to break it up. "I scarcely believe it in my power," she wrote, "to prevent [it] without doing violence to hearts which I hope are honest and good." She assured John that Tyler, "the gay, volatile youth," had become "the serious lawyer." She had done all she could to discourage the idea of an early marriage, but she had done it with tact and restraint. As long as the two young people felt that she was their advocate, she explained, they would accept her advice and guidance, but if she forbade them to see each other she would forfeit their confidence and perhaps precipitate an elopement. She wished them "to see that their interest is near my heart, and that my opposition is founded upon rational principles."

Then suddenly the romance waned. Royall and Nabby had a misunderstanding which left Nabby in tears and Tyler no longer a visitor at the Adams house. Nabby was sent to Boston for the winter for a change of scene and to help her take her mind off her shattered romance.

The sailing of the French fleet from Boston Harbor brought an end to the gay social life that had enlivened the communities scattered along the harbor's rim. Nabby had attracted a young French officer, Monsieur de Ramsay of the Armaquac Regiment, who made the Adams house his shore headquarters and wooed Nabby with Gallic grace and persistence. Snatched away by the sailing of the fleet, he wrote to Abigail of his pleasure in her company and that of her daughter. "Shall I ever be so happy as that she should deign to awake in her mind a remembrance of him whose breast she has inspired with the most indelible sentiments!"[1]

As the summer wore on Royall Tyler and Nabby patched up their rift. While Abigail watched uneasily, Tyler, at Nabby's behest, was allowed to visit in the character of a friend rather than as a suitor. Still declaring his love, he appeared anxious to prove himself. "His temper and disposition appear to be good. . . . He is regular in his living, keeps no company with gay companions, seeks no amusement but in the society of two or three families in town. Never goes to Boston but when business calls him there," and altogether seemed a most discreet and proper young man, Abigail assured John.[2]

The boys did well under the tutelage of William Shaw and the affectionate care of Abigail's younger sister, Eliza. Tommy had had rheumatic fever but recovered. Charles planned to enter Harvard at the age of fifteen and Tommy competed with him. Much of Abigail's thought and attention went into their education and their training for life. Braintree, and even more the world beyond, were full of dangers and temptations. Vice was everywhere; persistent, alluring, insatiable, it waited only for a person to relax his watchfulness to seize him with a grip far more dreadful than the ague or the flux. Her own brother seemed so possessed and everywhere among friends and relatives there were terrible examples of the pitfalls which awaited the weak or unwary.

Harvard, of course, was the most dreadful danger of all. If it was a palladium of learning, it was also a palladium of vice. "I have a thousand fears," she wrote John, "for my dear boys as they rise into life, the most critical period of which is, I conceive, at the university; there infidelity abounds, both in example and precepts; there they imbibe the specious arguments of a Voltaire, a Hume and Mandeville. . . . These are well calculated to entice a youth, not yet capable of investigating their principles, or answering their arguments . . . until he is led to doubt, and from doubt to disbelief." Many young students found Christianity too strict. Its teaching "gives not such pleasing latitude to the passions. It is too pure. It teaches moderation, humility and patience, which are incompatible with the high glow of health and the warm blood which riots in their veins."

On the farm it was difficult at best to get by. Living in the greatest simplicity, making her own and the children's clothes, scheming and planning for each penny and dollar, scraping along with "only two domestics," she still found it hard to make ends meet. On top of everything else, there was the Continental tax, the state tax, the town tax and the parish tax. But there were compensations. For John she drew a charming portrait of the family seated "round a cheerful fireside . . . all variously employed, sewing, reading, studying grammar, etc. . . . Papa is very often the subject of conversation and Mamma is never so highly delighted as when she can lay down to them some excellent precept and example which she recollects from his writings or his lips."[3]

She wished John home rather than herself in Europe. "I well know that real, true and substantial happiness depends not upon titles, rank and fortune, the gay coach, the brilliant attire; the pomp and etiquette of courts rob the mind of that placid harmony, that social intercourse which is an enemy to ceremony. . . . My ambition, my happiness," she wrote, "centers in him . . . who partakes not in the jovial feast, nor joins the luxurious table, without turning his mind to the plain unadulterated food which covers his own frugal board, and sighing for the feast of reason and the flow of sense."

Abigail wrote to her husband when she could; whenever there was a ship sailing from Boston to a European port she wrote of her loneliness and love. On the anniversary of their wedding she sat down to write: "The family are all retired to rest; the busy scenes of the day are over; a day which I wished to have devoted in a particular manner to my dearest friend. . . . Look to the date of this letter, and tell me what are the thoughts which arise in your mind. Do you recollect that eighteen years have run their circuit since we pledged our mutual faith to each other, and the hymeneal torch was lighted at the altar of Love? Yet, yet it burns with unabating fervor. Old Ocean has not quenched it, nor old Time smothered it in his bosom. It cheers me in the lonely hour; it comforts me even in the gloom which sometimes possesses my mind."

To her "the arrow of affliction" was the thought of the years that they had been separated, the joys they had lost which could never be recaptured, the agony of recollection. "Who," her heart cried out, "shall give me back time? Who shall compensate to me those years I cannot recall? . . . Should I wish you less wise, that I might enjoy more happiness? I cannot find that in my heart." Providence had placed the real blessings of life within the reach of people of moderate abilities, while "he who is wiser than his neighbor sees so much more to pity and lament that I doubt whether the balance of happiness is in his scale." Yet no man lived for himself, and Abigail found comfort in the thought "that the same gracious Being who first smiled upon our union, and blessed us in each other, endowed my friend with powers and talents for the benefit of mankind, and gave him a willing mind to improve them for the service of his country. . . .

"Life," she added, "is too short to have its dearest enjoyments curtailed; the social feelings grow callous by disuse and lose that pliancy of affection which sweetens the cup of life as we drink it." Deprived of the beloved, life shrinks into itself, "the blossom falls and the fruit withers and decays. . . . But, alas! with me, those days which are past are gone forever, and time is hastening on that period when I must fall to rise no more until mortality shall put on immortality and we shall meet again, pure and disembodied spirits. Could we live to the age of the antediluvians, we might better support this separation; but when threescore years and ten circumscribe the life of man, how painful is the idea that of that short space only a few years of social happiness are our allotted portion. Perhaps I make you unhappy. No. You will enter with a soothing tenderness into my feelings. I see in your eyes the emotions of your heart."

She could not forbear to reproach him for the rather formal tone of his letters. "I want you to say many more things to me than you do; but you write so wise, like a minister of state. . . . Life takes its complexion from inferior things. It is little attentions and assiduities that sweeten the bitter draft and smooth the rugged road."[4]

James Otis, old and broken, had been struck down by lightning during a spring storm as he stood in the doorway of his house in Andover, Abigail wrote. The news of his friend's dramatic death brought a flood of recollections to Adams. Otis had often wished, he recalled, that he might die in just such a way when his time came. It seemed to John a gloriously appropriate death. The man who was the principal architect of American independence, who had made political lightning play about the heads of his enemies, had fallen as he wished as though by the hand of God; "extraordinary in death as in life," a man whose name would never die "while the memory of the American Revolution remains, whose foundations he laid with energy, and with masterly abilities which no other man possessed."[5]

Abigail read John's declarations that he intended to retire to the rural life of Braintree with skepticism. She knew his restless and ambitious heart too well. "I have no reason to think that my friend would be permitted to retire from public life," she wrote John Thaxter, "whilst his active powers can be of any service to his country. A state of inactivity," she added, "was never meant for man; love and the desire of glory" were natural to man and capable, moreover, of being refined into "the most delicate and rational passions." The ambition which had prompted Alexander to upset the world and become "a scourge of mankind," in an Alfred or Augustus had been employed for the benefit of their fellows.[6]

It was from Abigail that John got an inkling of the popular resentment over the article in the provisional treaty that allowed the Tory refugees to return for twelve months. That, of course, was the maddening and baffling aspect of democracy. The people made a fickle mistress. Her servants could labor devotedly and with spectacular success but one small item which stirred the people's prejudices might bring on their leaders' heads the wrath of the democracy. "Your reward," Abigail wrote, "must be in a better state, you will scarcely find gratitude in this—loaves and fishes are not for you or yours." Many people had wished that Adams was at home so that he might run for Governor against Hancock, but Abigail, for one, had no confidence that he could have defeated the "Golden Calf," the idol of the people. Under the leadership or nonleadership of Hancock, who never acted or spoke unless he thought it would win him votes, the General Court was mired in bickering and backbiting.

Moreover the peace was not an unmixed blessing. Prices had dropped precipitously: "Goods fell and are now sold much below the sterling cost. . . . I believe the peace will ruin more merchants and traders than the war—many solemn faces you see in consequence of it. No such rapid fortunes to be acquired now. Taxes heavy, very heavy—trade stagnated, money scarce." Nabby wished eighteen yards of white lutestring, her favorite color, and ten yards of crimson English damask for a winter gown. For herself, Abigail wished a white and blue cotton and silk quilt like the one that Francis Dana had sent to his wife, "two green silk umbrellas and two pieces of Irish linen; oh, dear Ireland, no linen like yours, so white, so strong." Her own "mercantile affairs"—retailing the articles that John had sent her from Holland—had brought in some extra cash, but she was ready to abandon the enterprise with the return of peace.[7]

As the months passed the miseries of peace became more and more apparent. In Massachusetts half the members of the General Court, Richard Cranch among them, lost their seats as a consequence of their effort to insure that justice was done to a notorious Tory. "Discontent, jealousy and wrangling," Abigail wrote, distinguished the deliberations of the Assembly. Congress contributed its bit by an angry contention over half pay for officers which having once promised it now wished to repudiate. The soldiers of the Pennsylvania line mutinied and besieged Congress in the Philadelphia State House. Creditors demanded payment and debtors grumbled that they were being squeezed mercilessly. Congress was penniless and the people groaned at the burden of heavy taxes. It seemed to Abigail that anarchy and disorder were about to wipe out all the gains of the Revolution. "Heaven avert," she wrote, "that, like the Greek republics, we should by civil dissension weaken our power and crush our rising greatness. . . . We want a Solomon in wisdom, to guide and conduct this great people." After all, as every reader of history knew, the classic weakness of democracy was its tendency to degenerate into bitter factionalism.[8]

Abigail, a marvel of thrift and ingenuity, had managed out of her always meager funds to buy a piece of land that she knew John had long had his eye on. Seven acres of land at the foot of Penn's Hill which had belonged to John's uncle had come up for sale and Abigail had purchased it for two hundred dollars. It was thin, rocky soil, like most of Braintree, but Abigail estimated it held forty-five cords of wood, and John, when he heard the news, was delighted. It must be, he wrote, "that fine grove which I have loved and admired from my cradle." The thought of it renewed his desire to come home. He could serve in Congress for a while and in the Massachusetts Great and General Court but would hold "no more demanding offices," for the truth was his health was broken and he was not fit "for any great active employment." Whatever "feeble remnant" of his life was left, he wished to spend as a farmer. The terrible Dutch fever, he wrote, had burned up "more than half my spirit." It was a familiar chord he liked to touch—the devoted statesman, exhausted by his services to his country, worn in mind and body, returning like Cincinnatus to his humble life as a farmer. "I wonder whether anybody but you would believe me sincere," he added, "if I were to say how much I love you, and wish to be with you never to be separated more?"[9]

Abigail was also troubled by the rumors that John would be appointed ambassador to Great Britain. There were those who opposed it and "many who wish for that place, many who have a more splendid title and many more thousands [of dollars] to claim it with." She could not help but think of it with a kind of terror. She would have enjoyed going to France for a year or so with Nabby, "but to think of going to England in a public character and engaging at my time of life [she was thirty-eight and John forty-eight] in scenes quite new, attended with dissipation, parade and nonsense, I am sure I would make an awkward figure. The retired domestic circle, the feast of reason and the flow of soul are my ideas of happiness. . . . My health is infirm. I am still subject to severe nervous pain in my head, and a fatigue of any kind will produce it. Mere American as I am, unacquainted with the etiquette of courts, taught to say the things I mean and to wear my heart in my countenance," she was afraid her awkwardness would disgrace her husband. Then typically she added, "Yet strip royalty of its pomp and power, and what are its votaries more than their fellow worms? I have so little of the ape about me that I have refused every public invitation to figure in the gay world, and . . . I have sometimes smiled upon recollecting that I had the honor of being allied to an ambassador." The fact was neither of them seemed "to be built for duration" and she wished only that they might spend their few remaining years together.[10]

In December, Abigail went up to Boston for the annual Thanksgiving celebration and there her heart swelled with pride as the Reverend Dr. Clark preached to the patriots of the Revolution, among whom her husband had been a leading figure. After the service her uncle, Isaac Smith, met Francis Dana on State Street, back from his long and fruitless mission to St. Petersburg, and invited him to dinner. When Abigail heard of the arrival in Boston of John's friend she felt an overwhelming sense of desolation and wept bitterly, racked with choking sobs. She could endure the separation no longer. It was too much to bear for country, for honor, for posterity, for whatever. Her woman's heart had paid a great price already; she must have her man home or be with him wherever he was. It took all her resolution to pull herself together so that she could go down to greet the guest without betraying "childish emotion."[11]

John, for his part, thought more and more of the pleasures of having Abigail and Nabby with him and at the same time accommodated himself to a longer stay in Europe. "I want two nurses at least," he wrote to Abigail; "and I won't have any, at least female ones, but my wife and daughter." It would still be best for him to come home because if they came to Paris, he wrote teasingly, "you will get into your female imaginations fantastical ideas that will never wear out, and will spoil you both. (footnote: The question is whether it is possible for a lady to be once accustomed to the dress, show, etc., of Europe without having her head turned by it?) This is an awful problem—If you cannot be mistress enough of yourself . . . that you can put on and off these fooleries like real philosophers, I advise you never to come to Europe but order your husband home." If they came they must be prepared to pack up promptly and return, for his enemies might overthrow him at any moment. "I know," he added, "that Congress are bound from regard to their own honor as well as mine to send me to England. But it is the most difficult mission in the universe, the most desperate; there is no reputation to be got by it, but a great deal to be lost. It is the most expensive and extravagant place in Europe, and all that would be allowed would not enable one to live as a set of insolent spendthrifts would demand." He had already begun to savor the pleasure of cuts and insults from the haughty British directed at the simple, virtuous American farmer who had been one of the principal instruments of their undoing. "I am quite content," he declared in the familiar formula, "to come home and go to farming, be a selectman, and owe no man anything but good will."[12]

Still the negotiations over the final treaty dragged on. ("Here I am out of all patience," he wrote Abigail. ". . . No definitive treaty of peace signed, not likely to be signed very soon. . . . I would rather be employed in carting street dust and marsh mud.") Adams took advantage of the doldrum period to return to the Netherlands to push a commercial treaty with the Dutch, to ascertain the progress of the American loan and to bring John Quincy back to Paris with him.

At The Hague the father had a joyful reunion with his son. "The dear companion of my voyages and journeys" had grown several inches during his Russian sojourn, his voice had deepened, the spindly shanks of a boy had thickened to those of a man. "He is grown a man in understanding as well as stature," John wrote Abigail. He was delighted with his son's "very intelligent and entertaining account of his travels to and from the north." He was developing a style; he had a sense of proportion and a sense of humor. Adams was immensely proud and more nostalgic than ever. Seeing John Quincy in his straight, handsome young manhood made him yearn for the rest of the family, for his three boys "to keep us all in good humor." But that was too much to hope for; Charles and Tommy must pursue their studies with the Reverend William Shaw, Abigail's brother-in-law.

When Adams returned to Paris he found that the commissioners seemed no closer to the definitive treaty than they had been in the fall of 1782. They still waited on word from Britain and John took the opportunity to press, by hint and innuendo, his campaign for appointment as ambassador to the Court of St. James. "Our first object," he wrote Elbridge Gerry, "is to secure the liberties of our citizens in the separate states. Our second, to maintain and strengthen the confederation. Our third, to purge the minds of our people of their fears, their diffidence of themselves and admiration of strangers; and our fourth, to defend ourselves against the wiles of Europe." Six years' residence in Europe had given Adams a far greater awareness of the importance of foreign affairs than he had had before. "I see so much enmity," he wrote Gerry, "to the principle of our governments, to the purity of our morals, the simplicity of our manners, the honest integrity and sincerity of our hearts, to our contentment with poverty, our love of labor, our affection for liberty and our country; I see so many proofs of their hatred of all this and their dread of it, both as a dangerous example among their own corrupted, debauched subjects and as a sure and certain source of power and grandeur; I see so many artifices practiced to debase everybody you send or who comes to Europe . . . that I am convinced no pains or expenses should be spared to defend ourselves." It was therefore of the greatest importance to send upright and moral men to represent America in the courts of Europe. "You may depend upon this," he wrote Gerry, taking another swipe at Franklin, "the moment an American minister gives a loose to his passion for women, that moment he is undone; he is instantly at the mercy of the spies of the court, and the tool of the most profligate of the human race."[13]

Adams made clear to his friend what posts he would or would not accept. He was willing to be one of the commissioners for making treaties with other European countries, willing, as Gerry already knew, to go as minister to England, even willing to go to Vienna, but "determined not to be shut up croaking with the frogs in Holland . . . while others are employed to all your business of importance in the rest of Europe." In any event he must have his family, for he was decided, "God willing, never to live another year without my wife."[14]

To Dr. Cooper he wrote that he considered "the greatest difficulty confronting Congress was "to perfect the union of the states without endangering their liberties." His experience in European courts had convinced him that the danger of disunion was greater than the hazard of too strict a union. "Can we maintain our union? Can we treat with foreign nations? Can we oblige them to anything like equity and reciprocity in our communications with them, unless our foreign commerce is under one direction?" he asked.[15]

David Hartley, having been for seven weeks without instructions from his own government, produced the definitive American treaty in August 1783. It turned out to be the provisional treaty "without addition or dimunition." The American commissioners, although disappointed, agreed to the treaty as it stood because, in Adams' words, they realized that "all propositions for alterations in the provisional articles will be an endless discussion, and that we must give more than we can hope to receive. . . . Mr. Hartley told us from his court," Adams added, "that they had expected an American minister at St. James these three months, and that all further matters might be there discussed."[16]

On the third of September 1783 the definitive treaty was finally signed by representatives of the belligerent powers—England, France, Spain, America and Holland. Shortly after the signing of the treaty Adams received word that he, Franklin and Jay had been appointed, all together or any one of them, to negotiate a commercial treaty with Great Britain. It was not the vindication that Adams had insisted he must have if he was to continue to serve Congress. It was definitely half a loaf, and yet it was better than none. He wrote to Boudinot: "I am very sensible of the honor that is done me by this resolution of Congress and of the great importance of the business committed to our care." He would in addition push the Dutch loan, and if it was filled during the winter attempt to negotiate a new one.[17] To Warren he spoke of "the infinite honor" that the commission did him, which "ought to silence forever every complaint on my part for what is past." He was, he insisted, "now indifferent who goes to England."[18]

The arrival of his commission convinced Adams that he must remain in Europe until the spring, and he determined to send for Abigail and Nabby to join him. She should leave the two boys at the Shaws', place the farm under the care of her father or Dr. Tufts, and try to catch a late fall or early winter crossing for a European port—Amsterdam, London or any port city of France. The moment he heard of her arrival he would "fly with post horses to receive you at last, and if the balloon should be carried to such perfection in the meantime as to give mankind a safe navigation of the air, I will fly in one of them at the rate of thirty knots an hour. . . . I am so unhappy without you that I wish you would come at all events."[19]

In the middle of September the Dutch fever seized Adams again and he lay in bed for a week, ill and miserable, while Sir James Jay, physician and brother to Adams' friend John Jay, bled him, purged him and finally cured him. As soon as he was able to get about Adams decided to leave his noisy quarters at the Hôtel du Roi and establish himself at Auteuil, on the outskirts of Paris, at the edge of the Bois de Boulogne. There he might rebuild his health by walking and riding in the Bois and breathing the country air.

The house that he rented was situated in a charming spot with a large garden full of vegetables and fruits—among them grapes, pears and peaches. From his bedroom window he had a splendid view; he could see the picturesque village of Issy, the castle of Meudon, the palace of Bellevue, the Duc d'Orléans's castle at St. Cloud and the heights of Mont Calvaire. The Seine wound its slow way through the middle foreground and on its banks was a hothouse which glowed at night like a jewel clasped at the river's throat. Although the house commanded a view "of everything that is great, rich and proud," John insisted loyally that the scene was not to be compared "to the hills of Penn and Neponsit, either in the grandeur or the beauty of the prospects."[20]

Too weak at first to ride horseback, he took the air in his coach. Then, as his convalescence progressed, he borrowed Jay's horse and rode twice a day, first to the eccentric "pavilion of Bagatelle," built by the Count d'Artois, then to explore the "castle of Madrid" and the magnificent gateways and entrances into the Bois, until, as he wrote in his diary, "I . . . made myself master of this curious forest," full of charming prospects, of sheep, deer, horses and "now and then a hare, and sometimes a few partridges."

As soon as his health was improved Adams turned his thoughts to a project dear to his heart. He longed to see England. Since there was an excellent chance that Congress would decide not to send a minister to that country, and a possibility that if a minister was sent it would not be Adams, he decided on a tour with John Quincy. After all he was a commissioner to negotiate a treaty of commerce. Laurens had been in England since the signing of the provisional treaty and Jay had later joined him. A trip to London, he wrote Charles Storer, would divert his mind and help him to recover his health.

Before he left he wrote a hasty note to Abigail, urging her once more to join him as soon as she could. Bringing Nabby with her would perhaps be a solution to the romance with Tyler—"if the parties reserve their regard until they meet again and continue to behave as they ought they will still be young enough. Lawyers should never marry early. . . . Knowledge of the law comes not by inspiration, and without painful and obstinate study no man will ever have it."[21]

On Monday, October 20, Adams set out with John Quincy and a servant for London—through the Bois to St. Denis to take post horses, then to Chantilly, Amiens, Abbeville, over fine gravel roads, past stubbled wheat fields and gently rolling hills. Adams was like a small boy going to a fair.

All his life England, loved and feared, hated and admired, had obsessed him. She was his second mother, his preceptress. He was going back to the home of his race. The feeling was visceral—a dull kind of ache in the bowels, an ache made up of dread and anticipation. He was going to a mother he had never seen, only dreamed and read of, a proud, capricious, perhaps indifferent mother to whom he was an ungrateful and rebellious son.

At Calais the three travelers boarded a packet for the Channel crossing, but the winds were so contrary that it was eighteen hours before they arrived, more dead than alive, at Dover. "I was never before so seasick," John noted, "nor was my son." It was as though England wished to deny him access to her shores.

In Dover the little party lodged at the Royal Hotel Inn; John, along with John Quincy, mounted the chalk cliffs to examine with a farmer's eye the earth of England. At the summit of the cliff there was a plowed field sown with turnips. With a sense of exultation Adams walked into the furrows, picked up a handful of the soil in his strong, blunt fingers and crumbled it. It was full of flint stones like the soil along the road from Chantilly to Calais. France must have been bound to England where the Channel now flowed.

Turning toward the sea, father and son looked over an extraordinary vista—the Channel, the town and harbor of Dover beneath them with the white stone houses, three small boats on the stocks and a score of fishing sloops and schooners riding on the blue water. It was an enchanted scene. It was England; to Adams a richer, kinder country than France.

From Dover they went by coach through towns with names that rang like bells in Adams' memory—Canterbury, Rochester, Dartford—and then into London to the Adelphi Hotel in the Strand overlooking the crowded Thames where lodgings were outrageously expensive but the furnishings of the rooms blessedly familiar, "like," Adams wrote, "what I have been used to in America." From his chambers he could see Westminster Bridge in one direction and Blackfriars Bridge close by St. Paul's in the other. Next day he visited Jay and both men decided that there was little to be done until the British ministry discovered a friendlier attitude toward America. Fox sent word he would be pleased to see them, but when they went his conversation was so vague and evasive that Adams and Jay came away from their audience convinced the government had no intention of making any conciliatory gestures.

Between visiting and sight-seeing the time of the two Adamses was well occupied. John reported to Abigail, with obvious gratification, that they had "been very civilly and obligingly treated by some private gent[leme]n." England was a fine country but demoralized by prosperity. Among the sizable colony of non-Tory Americans, Adams enjoyed especially the company of Benjamin West, the American-born painter who had become one of the leading artists of the day, and young John Singleton Copley and his wife, whom Adams had known in Boston before the Revolution. West obtained from the Queen permission for Adams and his son to visit the royal apartments in Buckingham Palace and see her "inestimable collection of paintings by the greatest masters, Raphael, Rubens, Van Dyke and many others." For the Americans the highlight of their visit was the room which the King called, "Mr. West's room," containing only the paintings of that artist. West himself conducted them through the galleries and they lingered a long time in the room where his pictures hung—*The Death of Epaminondas, The Death of Bayard, The Death of Wolfe.* Heroic deaths were very much in vogue and West had made himself a master of the genre. Adams was especially struck with Raphael's cartoons, vast drawings that suggested even more than his paintings the artist's extraordinary mastery of the human figure and his animal vitality.

The King's military and naval room, Adams noted, "pleased me best." It contained the plans and models of every dockyard, fortress and man-of-war in the British Empire. "Come to Europe with Nabby as soon as possible," he wrote Abigail, telling her of his excursion, "and satisfy your curiosity, and improve your taste, by viewing these magnificent scenes—go to the play—see the paintings and buildings—visit the manufactures . . . and then if Congress pleases, return home with me to reflect upon them. . . . I cannot be happy nor tolerable without you. . . . I shall expect you constantly until you arrive."[22]

For John the most painful aspect of his London visit was the swarm of impoverished and desperate Americans who besieged him as soon as word of his arrival spread. Americans, or individuals who claimed to be such, imprisoned for debts, ill, maimed, stranded; and dozens of other supplicants, most of them down on their luck, who wished to go to America to make a new start and looked to Adams to get them there. From Walter Brown, a linen maker, a friend of America with twenty-one children, all "born in wedlock," to John Dudley, a one-legged American sailor in prison for debt, he received a stream of heart-rending petitions.

Through Copley, who applied to Lord Mansfield, Adams got tickets to the opening of Parliament to hear the King's speech and see the introduction of the Prince of Wales, recently turned twenty-one. Standing in the crowded lobby of the House of Lords, "surrounded by a hundred of the first people of the kingdom," Adams was struck by the extraordinary irony of life. Wedged in among the notables, John heard "the gentleman usher of the black rod" bellow out, "Where is Mr. Adams, Lord Mansfield's friend?" Adams identified himself and was conducted ceremoniously to a seat. An English acquaintance who witnessed the little drama could not forbear to remark, "How short a time has passed since I heard that same

Lord Mansfield say in the same House of Lords, [speaking of Adams] 'My Lords, if you do not kill him, he will kill you.' "[23]

Adams visited Sir Ashton Lever's museum to see his "wonderful collection of natural and artificial curiosities from all parts and quarters of the globe." He observed, among other things, a collection of "American birds, insects and other rarities which I had so often seen before at Norwalk in Connecticut, collected and preserved by Mr. Arnold and sold by him to Governor Tryon for Sir Ashton." In the garden he watched Sir Ashton and some of his friends "practicing the ancient but as I thought long forgotten art of archery. In his garden with their bows and arrows, they hit as small a mark and at as great a distance as any of our sharpshooters could have done with their rifles."

Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's, Windsor Castle and Eton School were all included on Adams' tour. Still he felt weak and debilitated and finally he set out for Bath to take the waters there. At the resort town he met his "ancient friend and relation" John Boylston, who conducted him about the town—"the Crescent, the public buildings, the card rooms, the assembly rooms, the dancing rooms, etc., objects about which I had little more curiosity than about the bricks and pavements."[24]

But before John even had time to dip into the restorative baths urgent word arrived from Holland that American credit was in desperate peril. The Dutch bankers, Willink, Staphorst and De la Lande, informed him that they had received word from Robert Morris that he had drawn upon them for a million florins, while they had only four hundred thousand on hand. Unless Franklin and France, or someone, came to the rescue American credit would be ruined beyond repair. "The greatest part of the holders of Mr. Morris' drafts, being Jews," the bankers wrote, "whom it doth not suit to wait for acceptance of their remittances, have determined to make them protest, which we could not prevent."[25]

Adams wrote off posthaste to Franklin to find out if Grand, the French banker for American funds, could make up the balance, but Franklin replied a few days later that no money was available in France, adding that he hoped Adams might stir up some funds in Holland to prevent the complete collapse of American credit. In the face of frantic notes from Willink *et al.*, there seemed nothing to do but rush to Amsterdam to try to secure an emergency loan from the Regency. Adams sent word to the anxious Dutchmen that he would hasten to consult with them. He should be there in ten days, he wrote, and then they would see what could be done to avert disaster.

After the three-day crossing John and John Quincy were put ashore on the island of Goree and there waited two days more to get iceboats to carry them to the mainland. Thus they made their way, exhausted and half frozen, to The Hague, from which city Adams, leaving John Quincy with the Dumases, rode on to Amsterdam. At Amsterdam he was closeted with representatives of the Regency and the Dutch bankers for hours on end, but in vain. Between timidity and lack of resources, the Regency proved a barren resource. It seemed to Adams "that American credit in this Republic is dead, never to rise again, at least until the United States all agree upon some plan of revenue, and make it certain that interest and principal will be paid."[26]

But Willink and Staphorst had a plan in reserve which, while it exacted an excessive interest, might tide Congress over the present crisis. Adams was reluctant to pay so much for the money but there was little alternative. Back at The Hague he wrote the bankers that if they could be sure of obtaining the cash to redeem the bills he would agree to go as high as six per cent. There seemed no help for it but to swallow the terms and trust that Congress would approve—terms that seemed to Adams "enormously avaricious." The loan would be sufficient to cover American drafts through February and perhaps March. By that time Congress must put its financial affairs in order or again face disaster.

XLIII

Although Franklin and Jay urged Adams to return to Paris to join them in negotiating commercial treaties, he was forced to remain at The Hague until the mechanics of the loan were completed. He occupied his time by riding daily for his health, visiting with his Dutch friends and conferring with the Prussian ambassador on a commercial treaty. Among the petitions and inquiries which he received in these months was a letter from the Reverend Mason Weems, Episcopal minister, bookseller and biographer, informing him that the Bishop of London and the Archbishop of Canterbury had refused to ordain American candidates for Episcopal orders unless they consented to take the oath of allegiance to the British Crown. This was manifestly impossible and the question then was where else might Americans be ordained by bishops of the Episcopal Church so that the apostolic succession might be preserved? Adams, on inquiry, found that the Episcopal Bishop of Denmark would be glad to perform the office and he sent word back to Weems that candidates for orders might make their way to that country.

With time on his hands John worried about the state of affairs in America. His anxiety about the temper of the United States was increased by a letter from his friend Gerry. Where Adams had expressed his concern over the weakness of Congress and its inability to regulate commerce, Gerry saw only the threat of tyranny. He wanted two capitals, a diminished Congress, no impost, no half pay for officers, and the control of commerce left to the individual states. To find such parochialism in someone to whom he looked for backing and support was a blow; it showed Adams the way the American wind was blowing.[1]

Another member of Congress from Massachusetts, Samuel Osgood, wrote to Adams that any effort to create "permanent funds under the direction of Congress" for paying off domestic and foreign debts would endanger the sovereignty of the respective states. "Our danger lies in this," he wrote, "that if permanent funds are given to Congress, the aristocratical influence which predominates in more than a major part of the United States [the Southern states] will finally establish an arbitrary government." It seemed clear enough to Osgood that the union was an unnatural alliance that could not long survive the strains and stresses to which it was subjected by the divergent interests of particular states and sections. This, he assured Adams, was the general sentiment of Congress, most of whose members felt that there was no safe way out of the country's "embarrassments." The same view was echoed by James Sullivan, Adams' long-time correspondent, writing from Boston. The states were jealous of each other. Rumors were rife that Congress was being bribed on the one hand by the French and on the other by the British and these rumors had spread suspicion and distrust. There seemed to Sullivan, as to Osgood, little hope that Congress could maintain a federal government of any "dignity and reputation."[2]

At The Hague, John Quincy acted as secretary for his father, copying his letters into a letterbook in an increasingly tidy and precise hand and making duplicates of important dispatches. Together they carried on John Quincy's studies, taking up mathematics and geometry, the father delighted with his son's quick and tenacious mind. John had been wildly undisciplined, impetuous, unsystematic. He had seen in John Quincy the same weaknesses—a strong temper, a thin skin, a dangerous impulsiveness—and he set himself, patiently and firmly, to subordinate these qualities which he had never mastered in himself and which had caused him so much real agony. His father's love helped form in John Quincy the iron will that masked his passion. The son's legacy was the tight self-discipline that the senior Adams never achieved. Abigail's exhortations were to the same end—reserve and control. She and John were fated to wear their hearts on their sleeves and suffer for their transparency. Although John Quincy in his earlier years had "a great flow of spirits and quick passions," he had acquired "reason to govern the one and judgment to guide the other." He must never allow his high spirits "to degenerate into noisy mirth." "I never knew a man of great talents much given to laughter," his mother wrote him. ". . . I do not mean by this," she added, "that you should assume a character foreign to your age. Youth is the season for innocent gaiety and mirth"; the laughing philosopher had been the happier man.[3]

As the days passed, Adams' thoughts were more and more preoccupied with the impending arrival of Abigail and Nabby. The countryside around The Hague was "in all its glory . . . a beautiful charming country," a lovely setting for his reunion with his ladies, his adored wife and his daughter, grown to a woman.[4] Hearing that they intended to ship with Captain Callahan to London, he dispatched John Quincy to await their uncertain arrival and bring them at once to The Hague. John Quincy was to make good use of his time by attending the parliamentary debates and continuing the sight-seeing expeditions which had been interrupted when his father dashed back to Holland to negotiate the new loan. John gave him detailed instructions: he must be discreet, "slow to speak, and swift to hear"; he should make no enemies, "and as many friends as you can honestly." His father wished him to buy Watson's *History of English Poetry,* and sent after him an account of the oratorical talents of the great speakers in the House of Commons.

Well established in London and a frequent visitor with the hospitable Copleys, John Quincy was nonetheless bitterly disappointed when Callahan arrived at the end of May without his mother and sister. There was nothing for it but to linger on in England. He found it impossible to gain admission to the House of Commons, which added to his depression. He missed his father and the attractions of London began to pall. But John took him to task: "A young gentleman of seventeen must not talk of low spirits for small disappointments. He must reconcile his mind to them." Dr. Warren had often told him, Adams wrote his son, that "I was the most uniformly lucky man he ever knew, and indeed I must acknowledge, I have often been fortunate, both before and since this compliment." Nevertheless his life had been a series of disappointments, "checkered with only now and then a ray of good luck."

During his brief visit to London, Adams had commissioned Copley to paint his portrait. He was painfully aware that it was a weak concession to vanity, but the former Bostonian pressed him to sit and John thought him such a master of portraiture that he could not resist. He wrote now to John Quincy, asking him to have Copley get a frame made for the picture and adding characteristically, "Thus this piece of vanity will be finished. May it be the last." "Keep your mind easy and your body cool, your spirits cheerful and your humor gay," he counseled his son. "Let nothing fret you or grieve you but your own faults, which I hope will be few. . . . Have a care of mistakes. Be sure you do your duty; fill your own sphere; and then leave the rest. . . . I want you here," he added, "as a secretary, as a companion and as a pupil." Since the arrival of Abigail and Nabby was uncertain, he might come back to The Hague if he wished and leave Abigail's cousin, William Smith, to escort the ladies to Holland when they arrived.[5]

When John Quincy had almost abandoned hope of getting into Parliament, William Vaughan arranged for him to be admitted to the gallery of the House of Commons. He stayed from two in the afternoon until one in the morning and wrote dutifully to his father describing the scene. "The subject," he observed, "was a very dry, uninteresting one to me." It was a disputed election for the Borough of Westminster and there was much tedious discussion over the evidence of illegal voting. "If I may be allowed to give my opinion," he added, "Mr. Pitt is upon the whole the best and most pleasing speaker of them all. He has much grace in speaking and has an admirable choice of words." Fox, on the other hand, spoke "with such an amazing heat and rapidity that he often gets embarrassed and stammers some time before he can express himself." Lord North was "very cool" but not of the caliber of Pitt or Fox, while Sheridan spoke as fluently but not as distinctly as Pitt.[6]

John was delighted with the letter. He urged his son to continue to attend that "great and illustrious school" and congratulated him on his report of the debates. He would look forward to further accounts. There was, he wrote, no accomplishment more useful "or which conduces more to the happiness of life . . . than the art of writing letters." The basic rules were "simplicity, ease, familiarity and perspicuity" but these were not acquired without long work and study. "Suffer no careless scroll ever to go out of your hand. Take time to think, even upon the most trifling card. Turn your thoughts in your mind, and vary your phrases and the order of your words that taste and judgment may appear even in the most ordinary composition."[7]

Having gained entree, John Quincy attended Parliament regularly; he noted again Pitt's "striking and pathetic manner," his clear voice and distinct enunciation, and Fox's "very artful and specious" argumentation. Leaving Commons one day, he met a young Marylander, William Vans Murray, who was studying law at the Inns of Court and was as bright and precocious as himself. Sharing, it seemed, a hundred common interests and enthusiasms, they became inseparable companions, went everywhere together and talked half the night about philosophy and politics.

When June passed without a sign of Abigail and Nabby, John Quincy returned to The Hague where he resumed his studies and his duties as secretary to his father. Adams, in a fever of impatience for Abigail's arrival, wrote her the third of July, enclosing his resignation from his post. If she had not embarked before she received the letter, he left it to her to make the decision whether to send the letter of resignation to Congress and call him home to Braintree, or to burn the letter and embark. "If you conclude to come to me," he added, "you may marry your daughter beforehand if you will and bring her husband with her; if you do not come you may still marry your daughter if you think proper." His own opinion was that she had better stay in Braintree. He would come, cultivate his farm, "and leave politics to those who understand them better and delight in them more. Breed my boys to the bar and business, and my girls too, and live and die in primeval simplicity and innocence." But of course he did not mean it, or meant it only momentarily in his disappointment over her failure to arrive in Europe and over the apparently endless procrastination and indecision of Congress.[8]

He wrote Franklin in the same spirit a few days later. For two years he had led the life of a spider, "after having led that of a toad under a harrow for four years before." But he was at the end of his patience.

Perhaps, he added, the commissioners should banish all idea of politics and devote themselves to a "course of experiments in physics or mechanics of telescopical or microscopical observations."[9]

"Why can't you be good boys, do as you are bid, and more; discover the secret wishes of the heart and make Franklin ambassador to St. James and Billy [William Temple Franklin] to Versailles?" Adams wrote Samuel Osgood. "Do this, call me home, and I will be answerable you will have no more propositions against having ambassadors in Europe."[10] "Don't," he added, "be profuse at the bung if you are frugal at the spigot." It was poor economy for Congress to maintain a feeble and inadequate diplomatic corps; by doing so they must inevitably suffer far more through loss of trade with the European powers than they could save on diplomatic salaries.

Adams had hardly dispatched his letters to Abigail and Franklin when he received one himself from Elbridge Gerry. Congress, meeting at Annapolis, had finally appointed three commissioners—Adams, Franklin, and in the place of Jay, who had returned home, Thomas Jefferson—to negotiate commercial treaties with the foreign powers. If Jefferson and Adams could work effectively together the commission should accomplish its task in good fashion. Franklin's efforts to have his grandson made secretary of the commission had been defeated on the grounds that such an appointment would be unfair to Adams and endanger the negotiations. Franklin might well resign, Gerry surmised, when he found that his grandson had been superseded, that Adams was the head of the commission, and that the treaties which the doctor had begun to negotiate alone had been placed in the hands of the commissioners. Indeed, Gerry wrote, the pro-Adams forces had not been reserved in their criticisms of the doctor, "having declared, in so many words, that so far advanced in years and so tractable is he . . . that it has become a matter of indifference to us whether we employ him or the C[oun]t de V[ergenne]s to negotiate our concerns at the c[our]t of V[ersaille]s."[11] John read the letter with a pleasing sense of vindication. There remained only the matter of the ambassadorship to the Court of St. James. If the letter might be taken as a clue, the auspices were favorable.

Now that it was settled that she was to join John in Europe, Abigail fell prey to all kinds of anxieties. The ocean seemed so formidable that her heart failed her. Without a husband "to console and comfort" her, she felt "unequal to the trial." But she suppressed her misgivings and pushed ahead with her plans to join John in Europe. She decided to leave the house itself in the care of Phebe, her father's Negro maid who had recently been married in Abigail's parlor, and to rent the farm itself to John Briesler, a "virtuous, steady, frugal fellow, with a mind much above the vulgar, very handy and attentive."[12]

The boys seemed happily established with the Shaws at Haverhill. Charles, Eliza wrote, "studies as if it was a pleasure to him," and Tommy continued to try to emulate his older brother. With the perversity of boys they raised doves on the one hand and, to their aunt's dismay, shot "poor sweet robins" on the other.[13] Abigail was reconciled to leaving them behind in such devoted care.

The most perplexing problem was the romance of Royall Tyler and Nabby. Adams' attitude toward the reformed playboy was the principal obstacle in the path of the lovers, and Royall, coached by Abigail, wrote his prospective father-in-law in a neat, small hand, sensitive and a little ornate, asking for approval of his suit. He had not written earlier because he had anticipated Adams' return from Europe and had hoped to plead his cause in person. Now Nabby was to go to join her father and Royall could "no longer defer . . . soliciting the sanction of your approbation." He did not expect Adams' consent to "an immediate union," yet he could not bear to be separated from Nabby without the hope of marrying her on her return to New England. Richard Cranch wrote at the same time to testify that Nabby's suitor was "possessed of politeness, genius, learning and virtue."[14]

John, who had already capitulated, replied gracefully that "the testimonials I have received of your personal character and conduct are such as ought to remove all scruples on that head." He could not in any case "have opposed the final judgment and inclination" of his daughter. If Nabby came with her mother he would be glad to have Tyler use his office for his law practice and avail himself of his library. "Finally, sir," he added, "you and the young lady have my consent to arrange your plans according to your own judgments, and I pray God to bless and prosper you both whether together or asunder."[15]

With her plans for sailing virtually complete, Abigail was subject to tormenting last-minute indecision. Her uncle, Isaac Smith, urged her to go with Captain Callahan from Boston in April and the Captain sent word that he would wait ten days for her if she wished to sail with him, but she hoped for some further word from John: "My thoughts are fixed, my latest wish depends on thee, guide, guardian, husband, lover, friend," she wrote him. Among the poor and ailing of the town who had on many occasions received help from Abigail, there was dismay at the prospect of her departure. There would be no one to provide for them in times of need.

The thought of seeing England, however, had a special appeal. Since childhood it had been her dream to visit "that once great nation," as she put it in a letter to John Quincy, but there had never seemed the slightest prospect that her dream would ever be fulfilled. Now the Revolution, which had so transformed her world, and her "intimate union and connection . . . with one of the principal characters" in that struggle had unexpectedly presented her with the opportunity.[16]

At the end of May, weeks after the time that John had hoped to hear of her arrival in London, the decision was finally made and passage booked on the ship *Active,* sailing in several weeks from Boston. In addition to Nabby, Abigail would bring the daughter of "neighbor Fields" as her personal servant. Writing John of her plans, she added, "I dare not trust myself with anticipating the happiness of meeting you, lest I should unhappily meet with a bitter alloy." It was hard, too, to leave her family and her friends, and Nabby, miserable at the impending separation from her lover, was moody and temperamental, moping about just when Abigail needed her most. The strain and excitement of preparations brought on migraine headaches and robbed her of her precious sleep.

Thomas Jefferson, the new commissioner to negotiate peace treaties with the European powers, hurried from Philadelphia to Boston, hoping to prevail on Abigail to sail with him from New York in July. He arrived the day before Abigail was to sail, and flattered as she was by the interest and attention of the gracious Virginian, she could not bring herself to change her plans at the eleventh hour.

The leave-taking was an ordeal. The day of Abigail's departure from Braintree, her friends and neighbors crowded into the little house to wish her godspeed, a company "not of unmeaning complimenters, but of the honest yeomanry, their wives and daughters like a funeral procession, all come to wish me well and to pray for a speedy return"—the ancient goodwife who had received Abigail's little benefactions for years, the family that Abigail had helped to nurse through the smallpox, the hired hand who knew her as a firm but thoughtful mistress, most of those in the village who had firsthand knowledge of her goodness, her concern for the ill, the old and the impoverished. Seeing them all gathered in the parlor, stiff and awkward in their best clothes, quite undid Abigail. She had resolved to retain her self-possession at all costs, but the scene was too much for her. Tears came to her eyes as she went around the room shaking hands with them all. And the stolid Braintree farmers and their wives wept too.

Most painful for Abigail was her farewell with John's mother. She had kept her plans secret but as soon as Susanna Boylston saw her dressed in her traveling clothes, she began to weep. "O! why did you not tell me you was going so soon? Fatal day! I take my last leave; I shall never see you again. Carry my last blessing to my son." Abigail could find no reply. She embraced her mother-in-law and left her "in an agony of distress, myself no less."

Almost as unnerving was the parting between Nabby and Royall Tyler. Nabby was in tears and Tyler himself showed such an excess of grief, sobbing and weeping and expressing despair in every line of his face and body, that Abigail suffered a few moments of uneasiness. Touching as such grief was, it seemed hardly manly. The Cranches were obviously embarrassed and Nabby's own unhappiness was increased by her fiancé's surrender to his emotions. But it was somehow gotten through. Nabby presented the undone young man with a locket on a gold chain; they exchanged keepsakes and pledges of undying love and parted.

Abigail was grateful to escape to Boston with Mary Cranch, who did her best "to amuse me and console me." There she shut herself up in a room at Isaac Smith's and tried to recover some of her composure. While Abigail rested and wrote letters, the servants supervised the loading of her belongings and Nabby's on the ship *Active*. John Briesler, whom Abigail had considered as a possible tenant for the farm, had been reluctant to take it over, so Abigail had secured other tenants and decided to take Briesler with her, in addition to her maid, Esther Field.

Like John Adams before them, the little party carried its own provisions, including a cow from which Abigail expected fresh milk, cream and butter. The *Active* was a merchant ship with two staterooms about eight feet square containing two small bunks and a chair. One was occupied by Abigail and Esther Field, the other by Nabby and another lady passenger, a Mrs. Adams of Lincoln, also going to join her husband abroad.

The other passengers were "a Colonel Norton . . . a grave, sedate man, of a good natural understanding, improved by business and converse with mankind"; Mr. Green, a volatile Scotsman with inflammability enough to furnish a wagonload of balloons; and Abigail's favorite, the kindly, cheerful Dr. Clark—"humane, benevolent, tender and attentive not only to the ladies, but to everyone on board, to the servant as well as the master"; Mr. Foster, a polite and self-effacing man, a merchant; and Mr. Spear, "a single gentleman, with a great deal of good humor, some wit, and much drollery." In such crowded quarters, Abigail wrote, the ladies at night undressed "about as much as Yankee bundlers." Writing to Mary Cranch, Abigail described the scene in the great cabin. Colonel Norton and Mr. Foster played backgammon, Mr. Green wrote at another table and Dr. Clark at a fourth; Mr. Spear read Thomason's *Seasons* "with his hat on," Esther Field knitted, and the steward bustled about with wine and port.

For ten days Abigail and Nabby were wretchedly seasick. In addition to the unfamiliar motion of the boat, the ship's cargo of potash and fish oil permeated the cabins with its pungent odor. The food, prepared by "a lazy dirty Negro with no more knowledge of his business than a savage," was served without order or reason—"higgledy-piggledy"—a leg of pork with the bristles sticking out like needles, fifteen minutes later a pudding, followed by a pair of roast chickens, then a piece of beef, and, when the meal seemed over, a plate of ill-cooked potatoes.

Abigail found one characteristically feminine consolation in her misery: at least John was not around to observe her so ill and wretched. Esther

Field was as sick as Abigail and Nabby, and John Briesler was equally incapacitated. A Negro sailor, Job, took the little group of invalids under his wing. But for him their plight would have been desperate indeed. "Kind, attentive, quick, neat," he acted as nurse for all four of the stricken ones. He seemed equally at home in a perilous swaying perch on the topgallant masthead and in gentle ministrations to Abigail and Nabby. He outdid the most agile sailor in a seaman's duties and then turned to making wine cordial to tempt the appetites of his stricken charges. His cheerfulness and skill made him, in Abigail's words, "the favorite of the whole ship."

The doors of the staterooms that Nabby and Abigail occupied opened onto a "great cabin" which served as a living and dining room, and as sleeping quarters for the male passengers at night. Abigail's cabin was so hot and close that she must keep the door open except when she dressed or undressed. She suffered the dirt and bad food until she was well enough to rise and exert her authority. First she mustered up a crew of ship's boys headed by John Briesler and sent them down with "scrapers, mops, brushes, and . . . vinegar" to clean the staterooms from top to bottom and scrub accumulations of potash and fish oil from the deck. Then she took the Negro cook in hand, taught him how to prepare the food properly and even invaded his galley and made several puddings with her own hands.

To go above and sit on the deck, cold and windy as it was, was like release from a noisome prison. Abigail and Nabby bundled themselves in baize gowns over double calico undergarments, wrapped their cloaks about them and watched the changing face of the ocean. There was not, Abigail reflected, "an object in nature better calculated to raise in our minds sublime ideas of the Deity." No one could contemplate it without "admiration and wonder," sometimes "smooth as a glass, then gently agitated with a light breeze, then lifting wave upon wave, moving on with rapidity, then rising to the skies . . . in majestic force." At night she saw it under the moonlight, "blazing and sparkling with ten thousand gems," until with the psalmist she was moved to cry, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, in wisdom hast Thou made them all."

Off the banks of Newfoundland, when Abigail had barely gotten her sea legs, the *Active* ran into an easterly storm. She had to cling to a chair anchored to the deck while "everything that was movable was in motion, plates, mugs, bottles all crashing to pieces." Retreating to their cabins, Abigail and Nabby had to hold on for dear life and spend a sleepless night, wet, dirty, cold and sick. The storm, which the sailors dismissed as "only a breeze," was fortunately of brief duration and the next day "the returning sun, a smooth sea and a mild sky" restored their courage and their spirits. But the poor cow was a casualty. She was so battered by the storm that she had to be killed and "consigned to a watery grave."

For Abigail, accustomed to an active life, her confinement to the little cabin was like an imprisonment. "We work, read, write, play, calculate our distance and amuse ourselves with conjectures of our arriving in port," she noted. Bracing herself against the walls of her cabin with her paper on a board on her lap, she wrote to Royall Tyler enjoining him to study hard—Grotius, Pufendorf, Bacon, and Vattel. These men he must master, "not superficially, skimming the surface which in every science serves only to bewilder the understanding and creates pedants in literature. . . . Reflection is a pole star which will point to the truth. . . . True greatness has its seat in the heart," she added, "it must be elevated by aspiring to great things and by daring to think yourself capable of them."[17]

It was the dirt of the ship, she wrote, that most appalled her: "it is utterly impossible to keep nice and clean. I strive for decency, and that can hardly be obtained." But she was sustained by the prospect of "the joyful day of meeting my long absent partner," and that "'unutterable happiness! which love alone bestows and on a *favored few.*'"

The fourth of July—"the anniversary," Abigail wrote in her journal, "of our Glorious Independence"—was a bright, clear day. Abigail was preoccupied with the meaning of that great event. "Whilst the nations of Europe are enveloped in luxury and dissipation," she wrote, "and a universal venality prevails throughout Britain, may the new empire, Gracious Heaven, become the guardian and protector of religion and liberty, of universal benevolence and philanthropy. May those virtues which are banished from the land of our nativity find a safe asylum with the inhabitants of this new world.

"As our country becomes more populous," she continued, "we shall be daily making new discoveries and vie in some future day with the most celebrated European nation; for as yet, we may say, with the Queen of Sheba, the one half has not been told. We are but in the infancy of science, and have but just begun to form societies for the propagation and encouragement of the fine arts." Abigail, as inquisitive as her husband, made friends with a number of the crew. The second mate, "a likely young fellow," told her that he had been taken prisoner by a British man-of-war and put in a British jail. He had escaped and made his way to Holland and there Mr. Adams had given him money and a passport. "It always gives me pleasure," Abigail noted, "when I hear of the kindness of my best friend to the poor and the needy." All men were the disciples of Christ if they had love for one another.

The closer the *Active* drew to the shores of Europe the more Abigail's thoughts were with her husband. She saw Mother Carey's chickens and flights of land birds that betoken the end of the voyage. "Am I so near the land of my forefathers?" Abigail wrote. "And am I, Gracious Heaven, there to meet the dear long absent partner of my heart? How many, how various, how complicated my sensations! Be it unto me according to my wishes."[18]

At last the interminable voyage drew to a close. On the twentieth of July the *Active* dropped past Dover and anchored in a squall of rain at the harbor of Deal. The passengers decided to take the pilot boat to shore and drove through six-foot waves onto the beach, soaked to the skin. There Abigail had her first experience of the social order of the Old World. She and the other passengers had seven suitcases between them which must be carried from the landing place to the custom-house, a few steps away. Seven porters rushed forward and each claimed one. They were taken to the house and then, when the baggage had been checked, seven more porters carried them across the street to the inn. In consequence, as Abigail wrote resentfully to Dr. Tufts, they had "fourteen of these rascals to pay . . . three Americans would have done the whole business and thought themselves well paid with half a dollar."[19]

Abigail's feelings as she lay sleepless in the little inn at Deal were akin to those of her husband when he had set foot on English soil some nine months earlier. England meant to her, as it had to him, more than she could well express. She was in that fabled, magic land whose history she knew and loved, the land of Shakespeare, of Milton, Chaucer, Spenser, yes, even the imprudent Smollett, of Alfred, of Magna Carta, of Locke and Algernon Sidney, of Pym and Hampden and the early Cromwell; she knew them all and in many instances she knew their words by heart. The great cadences of the language echoed in her tired brain as she waited for the benediction of sleep. Like John, she had in a special sense come home.

Riding next morning up through the vast fields of wheat, oats, English beans and hops which stretched out on either side of the road, she took note of the countryside with the practiced eye of a farmer's wife. Unlike the unkempt margins of New England fields, the land was "cultivated like a garden down to the very edge of the road," and in place of stone or rail fences there were hedges, thickened and knotted and tangled with age. The cattle, instead of being set loose to fend for themselves, were all attended by herdsmen; if the oxen were small, the cows and sheep were astonishingly large, great stout, sleek creatures, munching contentedly in the rich pastures.

At Chatham where they stopped for dinner Abigail was immensely impressed with the service—with the footmen and butlers and maids who scurried about carrying and fetching and attending on every whim of the passengers. America certainly had nothing like it. They were presented a bill of fare and chose, from a remarkable variety, the dishes they wished, which in turn were produced with astonishing promptness; the first dish presented in person by the master of the tavern.

Yet against the background of such luxury there was a somber note. On the road they had passed a chaise whose passenger had just been robbed. There had been a hue and cry after the thief; he was captured and brought to the tavern where Abigail saw "the poor wretch, ghastly and horrible," little more than a boy, and heard his captors say, "Ay, you have but a short time; the assize sits next month; and then, my lad, you swing." To hang a man for a robbery was bad enough, but to gloat over him seemed to Abigail intolerable. Such a scene would not take place in America. "Long may it be free from such villainies," she wrote Mary Cranch, "and long may it preserve a commiseration for the wretched."

In London, Abigail and Nabby found temporary shelter at a hotel in Convent Garden, and their fellow traveler, Mr. Spear, set out to locate Abigail's cousin, William Smith, or John and John Quincy, if they were in the city. William Smith and Charles Storer were soon tracked down and with their knowledgeable direction and advice the two women were soon established at "Osborne's New Family Hotel, Adelphi," where they were provided with a large "genteelly furnished" drawing room, a cook, a chambermaid and waiter for three guineas a week.

Abigail capitulated to the romance and excitement of London at once. She fell into the social routine of the American colony there and received every morning from nine to three a succession of visitors who came to pay their respects. Many were Tories, old friends from happier days who remembered her affectionately and hoped that bygones might be bygones. Charles Storer called almost daily, and John Quincy's friend, Vans Murray, offered his services. Mr. Appleton and Mr. Cushing called. A Mr. Jay, formerly a suitor of Abigail's sister Eliza, paid his respects; the Copleys of course; and the Hallowells, Boston Tories, who pressed Abigail to stay with them while she was in London. Ward Boylston, a cousin of Adams and quite an English dandy, paid Abigail a visit and she gave Winslow Warren messages from his mother and father, Mercy and the General. John had given Winslow a commission to visit the Heralds' Office and see if he could dig up a titled Adams somewhere among his ancestors. The answer was disappointing. It seemed there was no Adams from Somerset who was entitled to a coat of arms, but young Warren, with a cynicism beyond his years, suggested that John might "appropriate the arms of any *Adams* you please. . . . People have become more indifferent about the use of arms than they were formerly."[20]

After receiving guests all morning, Abigail dined at three and then dressed to go out. She and Nabby whirled about to the Haymarket, to the Copleys' where she saw John's portrait and Copley's picture of Samuel Adams exhorting his fellow delegates in the Massachusetts Assembly, then on "to what is called Mr. Copley's exhibitions." There two things struck Abigail most strongly. The first was the fact that, in Copley's famous painting of the death of Lord Chatham in the House of Commons, she saw dozens of faces that seemed familiar and that reminded her dramatically of "our own descent." Secondly, in the painting of the death of Major Pierson, she discovered a poignance that made her feel faint. She fancied she heard the groans of the soldier in the foreground who held a handkerchief to his side while the blood poured over his hand. "Grief, despair and terror" marked the picture and excited in Abigail and Nabby the most exquisite sensibility.[21]

From the exhibition of pictures, Abigail and Nabby, accompanied by Charles Storer and William Smith, went to Mrs. Wright's waxworks. Mrs. Wright rushed to the door, grabbed Abigail by the hand and poured forth a torrent of greeting: "Why, is it really and in truth Mrs. Adams? and that your daughter? Why, you dear soul, how young you look. Well, I am glad to see you. All of you Americans? Well, I must kiss you all." Wherewith she bussed Abigail and Nabby heartily and then passed on to the two young men, exclaiming, "I love everybody that comes from America." From her desk she took a card. "Here is a card I had from Mr. Adams; I am quite proud of it; he came to see me, and made me a noble present. Dear creature, I design to have his head." Then pointing to an old man and woman sitting in one corner of the room, she said, "There are my old father and mother; don't be ashamed of them because they look so. They were good folks; they turned Quakers and never would let their children eat meat and that is the reason we were all so ingenious." The parents sat in waxen immobility while the daughter rattled on like "Unity Bedlam."

Sunday, Abigail and Nabby went to the Foundling Hospital to divine service, glad after so long an interval to "again tread the courts of the Most High," and to offer thanks for His mercies in carrying them over the ocean. The foundlings sat in orderly rows on either side of the hall, the boys dressed in brown suits with red collars, the girls in brown with red girdles around their waists, checkered stomachers, aprons, and little white caps edged with lace, "clean and neat as wax."

In the evening they went to another service, this time at the Magdalene Hospital for fallen women. They had to travel three miles to reach their destination, for, Abigail wrote with awe, "this is a *monstrous* great city." The women were screened from sight, a measure whose delicacy struck Abigail most favorably. They sang hymns, accompanied by the organ, and "the melancholy melody of their voices . . . the serious and affecting discourse of the preacher, together with the humiliating objects before me," Abigail wrote Mary Cranch, "drew tears from my eyes."

After a fortnight of visits and sight-seeing, Abigail decided she was "in love with what I have seen of the London style of entertaining." There was enough that was familiar so that she felt quite at home; at the same time she was charmed and delighted by the magnificence of the city, by its variety, its elegance, its richness and, above all, its size. She was surprised at the informality of dress among both men and women. The English ladies were clearly a disappointment. They lacked style and elegance and seemed to take little care for their attire. Clumpy shoes and simple frocks were the mode. The women were expected to wear hoops and to have their hair dressed, "but a common straw hat, no cap, with only a ribbon upon the crown" was thought suitable for going calling. Feminine grace "is wholly laid aside here for the attire and manners of Amazonians," Abigail noted caustically.[22]

NOTES

CHAPTER I

1. Charles Williams, *Descent of the Dove* (Meridian Books, 1956), 176.
2. *Papers*, III, 256.
3. *Papers*, III, 257.
4. *Papers*, III, 260–61.
5. *Papers*, III, 257–58.
6. *Papers*, III, 258.
7. *Papers*, III, 259–60.

CHAPTER II

1. John Langdon Sibley and Clifford K. Shipton, *Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University . . .* (Cambridge and Boston, 1873–   ), V, 270.
2. *Ibid.*, VIII, 732.
3. Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1936), I, 170.
4. Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard College*, 115.
5. *Papers*, III, 261–62.
6. *Papers*, III, 262–63.
7. *Morison*, 120.

CHAPTER III

1. *Works*, I, 28.
2. September 1, 1755, APm.
3. *Works*, I, 27–28.
4. *Papers*, I, 9.
5. *Papers*, I, 13–14.
6. *Papers*, I, 133.
7. *Works*, I, 28.
8. *Papers*, I, 20–21.
9. *Papers*, III, 265–66.
10. *Papers*, I, 8.
11. *Papers*, I, 22.
12. *Papers*, I, 27–30.
13. *Papers*, I, 11, 39.
14. *Papers*, I, 8, 31.
15. *Papers*, I, 35.
16. *Papers*, I, 38.
17. October 12, 1755; quoted, *Works*, I, 23–24.
18. April 1, 1756; *Works*, I, 30.

CHAPTER IV

1. *Papers*, I, 54–55; III, 271–72.
2. *Papers*, I, 52, 80–81.
3. *Papers*, I, 58–59.
4. *Papers*, I, 66–67.
5. *Papers*, I, 69.
6. *Papers*, I, 78.
7. *Papers*, I, 61, 63.
8. *Papers*, I, 87.

CHAPTER V

1. *Works*, II, 521–25; *Papers*, III, 275–77.

CHAPTER VI

1. *Papers*, I, 130.
2. *Papers*, I, 214, 191.
3. *Papers*, I, 193, 201.
4. *Papers*, I, 217.
5. October 4, 1763, APm.
6. February 14, 1763, APm.
7. August 1763, APm.
8. Weymouth, September 12, 1763, APm.
9. April 7–9, 1764, APm.
10. Weymouth, April 8, 1764, APm.
11. Thursday, April 12, 1764, APm.
12. April 13, 1764, APm.
13. April 13, 1764, APm.
14. April 15, 1764, APm.
15. Weymouth, April 16, 1764, APm.
16. April 19, 1764, APm.
17. JA/AA, April 26, 1764, APm.
18. April 30, 1764, APm.
19. May 7, 1764, APm.
20. *Papers*, I, 229–30.
21. September 30, October 13, 1764, APm.

CHAPTER VII

1. *Works*, III, 447–64.
2. *Works*, III, 466.
3. *Papers*, I, 263–65.

4. *Papers,* I, 282.
5. *Works,* III, 476.
6. *Papers,* I, 294–95.

CHAPTER VIII

1. *Papers,* I, 337.
2. *Papers,* I, 338.
3. The episode is recounted in Adams' autobiography, *Papers,* III, 287–89.

CHAPTER IX

1. Adams' notes are in the "Admiralty Book," APm.
2. *Works,* II, 526–34.
3. Weymouth, September 14, 1767, APm.
4. *Papers,* I, 355.
5. *Papers,* I, 357.
6. *Papers,* III, 290.
7. *Papers,* I, 343, 348–49.
8. *Papers,* I, 341.
9. JA/JQA, September 13, 1790, APm.

CHAPTER X

1. *Papers,* III, 291–94.
2. *The Trial of the British Soldiers . . .* (Boston, 1824).
3. *Papers,* III, 294.

CHAPTER XI

1. *Papers,* III, 295.
2. *Papers,* I, 352.
3. *Papers,* II, 5.
4. *Papers,* II, 6–7.
5. *Papers,* II, 9.
6. *Papers,* II, 10.
7. *Papers,* II, 11.
8. *Papers,* II, 34–35.
9. *Papers,* II, 55.
10. Ca. 1771, APm.
11. The account of Adams' trip is found in his diary, *Papers,* II, 14–34.
12. *Papers,* II, 68.
13. *Papers,* II, 64.
14. *Papers,* II, 64–65.
15. *Papers,* II, 75–76.

CHAPTER XII

1. *Papers,* II, 76.
2. *Papers,* II, 76–77.
3. *Papers,* II, 79–81.
4. *Papers,* II, 82.
5. Boston, December 5, 1773, *W–A,* I, 18–19.
6. *Papers,* II, 85–86.
7. February 3, 1775; quoted, John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1943), 357.
8. Quoted in the *Massachusetts Gazette,* May 19, 1774.
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10. *Papers,* III, 299.
11. *Papers,* III, 299.
12. *Works,* IX, 337.
13. Boston, May 12, 1774. APm.
14. *American Archives,* 4th Series, I, 423.
15. June 25, 1774, *Works,* IX, 339.
16. July 14, 1774, *W–A,* I, 26–29.
17. July 17, 1774, *W–A,* I, 29–31.
18. *Memorial History of Boston,* ed. Justin Winsor (Boston, 1881), III, 56–57.

CHAPTER XIII

1. *Papers,* III, 307.
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38. September 26, 1775, APm.
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21. JA/Samuel Osgood, Philadelphia, November 15, 1776, APm.
22. August 25, 1776, *Works*, IX, 433–35.
23. William Tudor, August 15, 1776, APm; also Henry Knox to Adams on the same subject and Adams to Knox, August 13, 1776, *Knox Papers*, MHS.
24. August 24, 1776, *Tudor MS*, MHS.
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31. Princeton, May 28, 1777, APm.
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33. Watertown, December 3, 1775, *W–A*, I, 187.
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6. July 24 and 26, 1776, *W–A*, I, 263–64.
7. JA/JW, September 26, 1775, *W–A*, I, 115.
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14. To Cooper, September 4, 1776, *Works*, IX, 439–40; September 5, 1776, *FL*, 222.
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16. The account of the meeting is taken from JA/AA, September 14, 1776, *FL*, 226–27; JA/SA, September 17, 1776, *Works*, IX, 443–44.
17. September 19, 1776, APm.
18. JA/Tudor, n.p., n.d., APm.
19. October 1, 1776, APm.
20. February 3, 1777, *Works*, IX, 450–51.
21. October 2, 1776, APm.
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23. October 1, 1776, *FL*, 228–29.
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5. JA/AA, Dedham, January 9; Hartford, January 13; Fishkill, n.d.; Poughkeepsie, January 19; Orange County, N.Y., January 20; Easton, January 24, 1777, *FL*, 233–37.
6. JA/Warren, February 3 and 17, 1777, *W–A*, I, 288–89, 293–94.
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8. March 6, 1777, *W–A*, I, 297–98.
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22. April 26, 1777, *FL*, 264–65.
23. March 22, 1777, *Works*, IX, 459–61.
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25. Bound Brook, May 7, 1777, APm.
26. In Camp, May 9, 1777, APm.
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2. April 3, 1777, APm.
3. April 29, 1777, *FL*, 260–61.
4. May 16, 1777, *Works*, IX, 465–66.
5. May 10, 1777, *FL*, 272.
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7. August 30, September 1 and 2, 1777, *FL*, 302–4.
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29. August 5, 1777, *FL*, 287–88.
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4. Adams' account of his voyage is in his diary, *Papers*, II, 273–93.
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8. April 20, 1778, APm.
9. Lee/Adams, Chaillot, October 6, 1778; and Adams/Lee, Passy, October 10, 1778; *Wharton*, II, 756–57, 760–61.
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9. JA/Lovell, Passy, July 22, 26, 1778, *Wharton*, II, 665.
10. Passy, May 21, 1778, *Wharton*, II, 591–93.
11. JA/Lovell, January 3, 1779, APm, letter never sent.
12. To the Commercial Committee, May 24, 1778, *Wharton*, II, 595.
13. Franklin/Lovell, Passy, July 22, 1778, *Wharton*, II, 656–60.
14. Marly, June 6, 1778, *Wharton*, II, 606.
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19. August 4, 1778, *W–A*, II, 38–40.
20. July 9, 1778, APm; JA/SA, Passy, July 28, 1778, *Wharton*, II, 667.
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9. The account of the crossing is in Adams' diary, *Papers*, III, 381–400.

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1. *Works*, VII, 99–110.
2. Braintree, September 19, 1779, APm.
3. JA, probably to Lovell, September 21, 1779, APm.
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6. Braintree, November 4, 1779, APm.
7. September 27 and 29, 1779, *Wharton*, III, 339–41, 345–46, 337–38n.
8. Philadelphia, September 29, 1779, APm; also James Lovell/Adams, September 27; September (no day); October 1; and Henry Laurens/JA, October 4, 1779, APm.
9. Philadelphia, October 12, 1779, APm.
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5. Adams' account of the trip is in his diary, *Papers*, II, 404–26.

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8. March 3, 1780, *Wharton*, III, 528–29.
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10. October 2, 1780, APm.
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12. March 16, 1780, *W–A*, II, 129–30.
13. May 26, 1780, APm.

14. Auteuil, April 27, 1785, APm.
15. December 9, 1780, *W–A*, II, 156–57.
16. May 15, 1780, and Genet's reply, Versailles, May 17, *Wharton*, III, 679–80, 685.
17. Paris, February 23, 1780, *FL*, 376.
18. N.d., 1780, *FL*, 379.
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28. March 7, 1780, APm.

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1. March 16, 1780, *Wharton*, III, 551–52.
2. JA/John Bondfield, Paris, April 25, 1780, APm.
3. April 29, 1780, APm.
4. May 5, 1780, *Wharton*, II, 651.
5. June 20, 1780, *Wharton*, III, 805.
6. Versailles, June 21, 1780, *Wharton*, III, 805–7.
7. June 22, 1780, *Wharton*, III, 809–16.
8. Vergennes/Franklin, June 30, and to Adams same date, *Wharton*, III, 828.
9. July 10, 1780, *Wharton*, III, 844.
10. July 13, 1780, *Wharton*, III, 848–55.
11. July 20 and 21, 1780, *Wharton*, III, 870, 872.
12. July 25, 1780, *Wharton*, III, 882.
13. July 26, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 7–10.
14. July 27, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 12–14.
15. July 30, 1780, *Wharton*, III, 16–17.
16. July 31, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 18–19.
17. August 9, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 21–25.
18. December 4, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 181–82.
19. Passy, October 8, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 86–87.

Chapter XXXV

1. August 14, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 29.
2. August 17, 1780, *Wharton*, III, 34–35; September 15, 1789, APm.
3. September 15, 1780, *FL*, 386.
4. September 25, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 67–69.
5. September 5, 1780, APm.
6. JA/President of Congress, September 5, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 45–46.
7. Amsterdam, September 12, 1780, AP.
8. Appeltern, October 16, 1780, *Works*, VII, 317–18.
9. November 30, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 175.
10. November 30, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 175–76.
11. December 7, 1780, APm; May 16, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 419–21.
12. Leyden, March 28, *Wharton*, II, 334–35; December 18, 1780, *FL*, 388–89.
13. December 18, 1780, *FL*, 388–89.
14. December 9, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 189–90.
15. December 25, 1780, *Wharton*, IV, 208–9; December 18, 1780, APm.
16. January 4, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 226–27.
17. January 14, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 231.
18. January 24, February 6, 1781, APm.
19. February 8, 1781, APm.
20. Amsterdam, March 1, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 270–71.
21. Leyden, March 19 and 27, 1781, APm.
22. JA/Sigourney, Ingraham and Bromfield, April 9, 11, and 13, 1781, APm.
23. Leyden, April 10, 1781, APm.
24. April 6, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 351–52.
25. April 16, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 363–64.
26. July 16, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 576–77.
27. July 18, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 589–90.
28. July 19 and 21, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 595–96.

Chapter XXXVI

1. October 15, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 779–80.
2. October 15, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 776–79.
3. JA/Congress, Amsterdam, October 25, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 810–12.
4. December 18, 1781, *FL*, 402–4.
5. December 26, 1781, APm.
6. October 15, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 776–77.
7. Leyden, April 18, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 368–70.
8. December 14, 1781, Dana Papers, MHS.
9. Philadelphia, October 23, November 20, 1781, *Wharton*, IV, 806–8, 849–51.
10. January 14, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 97;

and JA/Van der Capellen, January 14, 1782, APm.
11. February 27, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 206–7.
12. Digges/Franklin, March 22, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 269–71.
13. February 12, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 192–99.
14. The Hague, JA/AA, May 14, 1782, APm.
15. JA/Livingston, September 4, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 685–93.
16. April 28, 1772, Dana Papers, MHS; June 2, 1782, APm.
17. April 23, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 326.
18. JA/Jenings, April 28, 1782, APm.
19. May 8, 1782, APm.
20. N.d., n.p., APm.
21. March 15, 1782, Dana Papers, MHS.
22. June 16, 1782, APm.
23. May 13, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 415.
24. Friesland, Jacob Roorde, May 5, 1782, APm.
25. May 14, 1782, APm.
26. May 2, 1782, APm.
27. JA/Franklin, Amsterdam, May 2, 1782, APm.
28. April 16, 1782, APm.

CHAPTER XXXVII

1. April 28, 1782, Dana Papers, MHS.
2. May 14, 1782, APm.
3. December 2, 1781, *FL*, 396–98; July 4, 1782, APm.
4. July 9, 1782, APm.
5. June 17, 1782, BPL.
6. JA/AA, August 13, 17 and 29–30, 1782, APm.
7. The Hague, July 25, 1782, APm.
8. September 17, 1782, APm.
9. July 20, 1782, APm.
10. Brussels, JA/Jenings, July 20; Jenings/JA, July 24, 1782; Philadelphia, August 7, 1782, APm.
11. July 20, 1782, APm.
12. August 13, 1782, *Wharton*, V. 660–61.
13. August 12, 1782, APm.
14. Elkanah Watson, *Men and Times of the Revolution*, ed. Winslow C. Watson (New York, 1857), 233–43.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

1. February 5, 1781, BPL.
2. May 23, 1781, June 17, 1782, BPL.
3. May 25, 1781, *FL*, 392–94.
4. December 9, 1781, *FL*, 398–402.
5. October 8, 1782, APm.
6. November 13, 1782, APm.
7. July 17, 1782, APm.
8. June 17, 1782, APm.
9. N.d., 1782, APm.
10. September 5, October 8, 1782, APm.
11. October 8, 1782, APm.
12. December 30, 1782, APm.

CHAPTER XXXIX

1. JA/Livingston, The Hague, September 17, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 733–35.
2. *Works*, III, 281.
3. October 12 and 16, 1782, APm.
4. The Hague, September 29, 1782, APm.
5. August 29–30?, 1782, APm.
6. The Hague, September 17, 1782, APm.
7. November 8, 1782, APm; November 8, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 864–66.
8. *Papers*, III, 31.
9. *Papers*, III, 32.
10. *Papers*, III, 34.
11. *Papers*, III, 36.
12. *Papers*, III, 37.
13. October 31, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 838–40.
14. November 6, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 854–58.
15. Paris, November 17, 1782, APm.
16. *Wharton*, V, 849.
17. November 17, 1782, APm.
18. November 5, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 849–50.
19. *Papers*, III, 59–61.
20. *Papers*, III, 49–50.
21. Paris, November 11, 1782, *Wharton*, V, 875–78.
22. *Papers*, III, 66–67.
23. December 4, 1782, *Wharton*, VI, 107–8.
24. November 4, 1782, *Wharton*, VI, 106.
25. December 15, 1782, *Wharton*, VI, 140.
26. JA/Samuel Osgood, The Hague, June 30, 1784, APm.

CHAPTER XL

1. Madison, Report of Debates in Congress, December 24, 1782, *Wharton*, VI, 161.
2. Paris, July 9, 10, and 11, 1783, *Wharton*, VI, 529–36.
3. April 7, 1783, APm.
4. April 9, 1783, *W–A*, II, 205–6.

5. April 16, 1783, APm.
6. February 5, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 242–47.
7. January 22, 1783, APm.
8. January 29, 1783, APm.
9. February 4, 1783, APm.
10. April 8, 1783, APm.
11. To Livingston, Paris, June 23, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 501–2.
12. June 10, April 16, 1783, APm.
13. May 30, 1783, APm.
14. To Livingston, July 9, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 529–31.
15. Wheelock/JA, The Hague, June 12, 1783, APm.
16. Works, III, 378.
17. May 19, 1783, AP.
18. JQA/JA, The Hague, May 24, 1783, APm.

CHAPTER XLI

1. June 27, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 504–5.
2. Paris, June 27, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 506–7.
3. JA/Livingston, Paris, July 7, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 517–18.
4. July 16 and 18, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 551–54, 560–62.
5. July 11, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 536–37.
6. Auteuil, December 15, 1784, APm; Princeton, November 1, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 719–20.
7. Passy, July 22, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 580–82.
8. From a letter dated at The Hague, April 9, 1784, APm, without an addressee, apparently not sent.
9. Auteuil, April 25, 1782, APm.
10. The Hague, March 28, 1784, APm.
11. The Hague, April 16, 1784, APm.

CHAPTER XLII

1. April 26, 1783, APm.
2. June 20, 1783, APm.
3. November 11, January 10, 1783, APm.
4. November 13, October 25, 1782, *FL,* 408, 405–7.
5. JA/Mercy Otis Warren, Paris, September 7, 1783, APm.
6. July 1, 1783, BPL.
7. May 7, 1783, APm.
8. June 20, 1783, APm.
9. JA/AA, July 16, August 14, 1783, APm.
10. December 15, November 19, 1783, APm.
11. December 15, 1783, APm.
12. July 13, 1783, APm.
13. September 3, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 669–71.
14. September 5, 1783, APm.
15. September 10, 1783, APm.
16. August 13, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 645–46.
17. Paris, September 8, 1783, *Wharton,* VI, 683–84.
18. September 10, 1783, APm.
19. September 7, 1783, APm.
20. JA/Warren, Auteuil, August 27, 1784, APm.
21. October 14, 1783, APm.
22. November 8, 1783, APm.
23. The story is told by Adams in his article in the Boston *Patriot,* May 9, 1812.
24. Boston *Patriot,* May 9, 1812.
25. December 2, 1783, APm.
26. To Franklin, The Hague, January 24, 1784, APm.

CHAPTER XLIII

1. November 23, 1783, APm.
2. Boston, December 21, 1783, APm.
3. December–January, 1783–84, APm.
4. JA/JQA, The Hague, May 28, 1784, APm.
5. June 1784, APm.
6. June 6, 1784, APm.
7. June, n.d., 1784, APm.
8. The Hague, July 3, 1784, APm.
9. The Hague, July 19, 1784, APm.
10. The Hague, June 30, 1784, APm.
11. Philadelphia, June 16, 1784, APm.
12. February 11, 1784, APm.
13. March 26, 1784, APm.
14. January 13 and 20, 1784, APm.
15. April 3, 1784, APm.
16. April 12, 1784, APm.
17. July 10, 1784, APm.
18. Abigail's account of the crossing is in the *Papers,* III, 154–66.
19. Auteuil, September 8, 1784, APm.
20. July 13, 1784, APm.
21. July 25, 1784, *Letters of Mrs. Adams, Wife of John Adams,* ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston, 1840), 31–34.
22. *Letters of Mrs. Adams,* II, 33–39.